A DISCOURSE OF CLOSET (or SECRET) PRAYER, FROM *MATT.* VI. 6.

First Preached, and now Publiſhed at the Requeſt of thoſe that heard it.

BY *SAMUEL SLATER*, Miniſter of the Goſpel.

LONDON:
Printed for *Jonathan Robinſon*, and *Tho. Cockerill*, at the *Golden-Lion* in St. *Paul's Church-Yard*; and at the *Three Leggs* in the *Poultry*, over againſt the *Stocks-Market*. MDC XCI.

A
DISCOURSE
OF
CLOSET (OR SECRET)
PRAYER.
FROM
MATT. VI. 6.
First Preached, and now
Published at the Request
of divers Christian Friends.

To that Flock of Christ, over which the Holy-Ghost hath made me an Overseer.

Beloved in the Lord,

IF Sins and Troubles make times bad, those have been so in which our lines have been cast; as great and glorious light hath shin'd in our Horizon, as in any since the Apostle's Age, yet the works of darkness have abounded among us, Superstition, Persecution and Prophaneness. Great numbers among us have the light of Truth, and gladly would have it extinguished; And who can count those who walk as enemies to the Cross of Christ, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame? We have had fierce disputes, and hot contentions (Venit pro artis & locis) for lifeless Forms and Ceremonies not worth a button, which have been bones of Contention in the Church of God ever since the Reformation, and will continue so to be, till Men are grown wise enough to cast them out; but at the same time, the Vitals of Christianity, and Power of Godliness have been forgotten and neglected, nay, by the generality, (such Christians there are in our days) ridicul'd and ba-

ted; so that many live direct contradictions to the Profession they make, and throw dirt upon that Name in which they would be thought to Glory. The grand design, indeed, driven on among us, hath been to reduce these Nations to the See of Rome; *and to bring in Popery among us; in order whereunto, Men taught by the Devil, and wise to do evil, have by their Hellish and Cursed Examples introduc'd prophaneness; for none so fit to make a Doctrinal Papist, as one that is a Practical Atheist. How far these persons have prevailed, and this Nation hath been by them immoralized and debauched, and all ranks of Men among us, Clergy as well as Laity, Nobility and Commons, Gentlemen and Peasants, vitiated both in Principles and Life, is, alas! too obvious and visible to any one that hath an eye in his head. And if ever God hath a purpose to do this Nation good, and to deliver us from implacable enemies, and menacing dangers, and after all our fears, and convulsions, and shakings, to settle us upon sure and lasting foundations, he will reform us. I wish that every one would reform himself, and save our Rulers a labour; if they will not, I wish that our Governours would imploy their power; and as they are providing (as necessity requires) against a potent Adversary abroad, so they would, by the vigorous execution of wholesome Laws against overflowing sins within, which do most expose us to ruin, because to Divine wrath*

and

and thereby (if I may so speak) save God a labour: But if they will not do their work, God will do hers. It is my hope, that he will not forsake this pleasant Land, in which he hath so great an interest; but mind it, that he might delight in it, though in what way, and by what means, whether by some smarting Rod, or stinging Scorpion, teaching us by Briars and Thorns, letting out the corrupt Blood by tremendous Judgments, or more gently by the Word, it is not for me to determine, that we must leave to him whose wisdom is unsearchable, and his ways past finding out. Though I cannot but hope well from his gracious opening such a wide and effectual door to his glorious Gospel, and giving to it so free a passage, as, blessed be his name, we see at this day; and restoring a desired and welcome liberty of Preaching to many of his faithful and eminent Servants, who had by severe Laws been driven, and kept out of the Vineyard; for which many of them who had an hand in making those Laws, have answered at the highest and most dreadful Tribunal; and the rest shall in due time, too soon for them. The good Lord grant, that while the Gospel runs, it may be glorified, by attaining its most excellent and noble end in the hearts and lives of those who sit under the joyful sound thereof; that so Religion may recover its pristine Lustre, yea, shine forth with a greater glory than it did in the days of our most famous Predecessors.

Altogether unexpectedly to us, he pleased the great God (whose right it is to dispose of us according to his good pleasure) to call me to Minister to you in the Gospel of his Son, after he had taken home to an everlasting Rest, and fulness of Joy, in and with himself, your former, Learned, and every-way accomplished Pastor, whose death was, as it deserved to be, bitterly bewailed by you. In the same Relation to you he hath continued me for almost these Fifteen years during which space of time, variety of Providences have passed over our heads, we have met with both Halcion and Tempestuous days; but we must, we are obliged to give an honourable report of him, as having been to us a shadow from the heat, and a shelter from the storm; so that few of our Sabbaths have been, in the fury of the times, Fasting-days throughout, and very few of our Meetings disturbed and violently broken up: But as he was pleased to give me an heart to Preach, so you had from him an heart to hear; and however some that went off from us have tack'd about, and defiled their Garments, the most of you have weathered the point, born the brunt, kept your ground, and found mercy to be faithful to the Cause you owned, not sinfully complying with the Lusts of Men, nor submitting to their impositions, and unscrip-

tural

tural mixtures with, and to things pertaining to Divine Worship; upon which account among many others, I can look upon you as those that have been, and yet are, and will, I hope, go on to be my Joy and Crown.

I can call God to witness, that I love you in truth, and have both sincerely and earnestly desir'd your good, endeavouring to the utmost of my ability, to make known unto you the whole Counsel of God; not putting you off with Rhetorical flourishes, the enticing words of Man's wisdom, new and empty notions, Philosophical strains, and inventions of Men; but with that Bread that came down from Heaven, nourishing you up to Eternal Life; determining to know nothing among you, but Jesus Christ, and him Crucified, who is the admiration of Angels, and worthy to be the desire of all Nations; but too little Preached in England, *in* London *at this day; and too little valued and believed in. He hath been the great subject of my Discourses among you, while, as you will bear me testimony, I have not sought yours, but you. And as you did chuse your Cook, so you have liked the Provision he dreſt and set upon your Board, having been, for the greatest part, as constant in your attendance upon my Ministry, as any in* London; *and not like many, given to change, wandering up and down from place to place,*

by means whereof their itching Ears have been more tickled, than their precious Souls advantaged; yea, some of them running from the Flock to which they belong, and not keeping the place in which God by his Providence had set them, have fallen into the hands of Seducers, who have led them out of the way Everlasting, and then robbed them of their Light and Heat, the precious Truths of God, and their Zeal for him, leaving them wounded both in Head and Heart, and wallowing in the Blood of their Apostacy.

I was, in a prudent and very modest Letter desired to preach upon that excellent Duty of Secret Prayer, by one of your number, who had with grief taken notice what strangers some Professors are to the practice of it, yea, how some do live in the total neglect of it, as if it were altogether unnecessary and unprofitable. The motion being made, did meet with a very ready and chearful entertainment: I stood not debating, but presently closed and buckled to the business, and the very next Lord's Day begun it. A single Sermon only was desired, and I intended no more: but having once engaged my thoughts, they multiplied, and grew up into four. As soon as I knew the person that sent me the Letter, and made the Motion, I gave her my Thanks, and I do here repeat them, because I find that many, through the Blessing of God, have got good by it.

When

When I had finished the Discourses, a Letter, subscribed by several, was presented me, desiring, That what had been Preached, might be Printed; which was granted as soon as asked; though the Great Work which lieth upon me, doth render Printing very tedious to me, and alloweth me not that exactness which I delight in, and should otherwise endeavour. But I am Yours, and take pleasure in being so, and know not how to deny you any thing. And now I wish, That what is here sent abroad into the open World, might find acceptance there, and meet with a kind reception from Others, as it did from You; and also, That it may bring forth much fruit, and accomplish that for which it hath been designed, even the good of precious Souls, the awakening to, and quickening in this great piece of practical Godliness, those who have totally neglected it, or been exceeding remiss.

Little do Men and Women think how greatly they prejudice themselves by carelessness touching matters of this nature: they had better act by halves, and trifle in the Affairs of this World, than in those of Religion. How can any think to be supplied from that Stock which is laid up in the hand of Christ, or to be enriched by his inexhaustible fulness, if they do not seek him? How can any expect the performance and making good of the Promises to them, unless they put them in suit? How can any rationally hope, that they shall with

Joy

Joy draw Water out of the Well of Salvation, when they will not take so much pains as to let down their Bucket into it? Though great and glorious things be in the heart and purposes of God concerning his People, and he hath passed his Word for them, which is better than Man's Bond, Security sufficient; yet he will be enquired of by them to do them for them. Well, whoever they be who undervalue God, making him the Object neither of their Love nor of their Fear; whoever they be that say unto God, Depart from us, we desire not the knowledge of thy ways, nor to maintain any fellowship with thy Majesty; *whoever they be that taste no sweetness in holy Exercises, and see not that God is necessary, but hope to pick up a satisfaction for themselves out of inferior and transitory Goods: Let your wants drive you to God, and your love draw you to him; do you seek the Lord, and his strength, yea, seek his face evermore; lay hold upon all opportunities of meeting with him, hearing from him, and pouring out your Souls before him; go with* Zacheus *into the* High-way, *that there you may get a sight of* Christ; *and with the* Spouse *into the* secret places of the stairs, *and there let him hear your voice. Certainly, all those that are born of God, have been made partakers of the Holy Ghost, are entitled to the Glory above, and joint-heirs with Christ; have received and are acted by the*

Spirit

Spirit of Adoption, which is a Spirit of Grace and Supplication, and puts them upon going to him in all cases, as to their Father in Christ, their God in Covenant. They are in the Scripture called, The Generation of them that seek him. *And let men say what they will, it will be found, That the most praying Christians are the most thriving Christians; They are the persons that now get most of Heaven, and make the happiest progress in the way thither. Do you therefore in the morning direct your Prayer to God, and look up; do you present Him with the First-fruits, so will the whole be sanctified; by that means you will secure to your selves his direction in the difficulties of the day, his defence against the temptations of it, his support under the afflictions of it, his assistance in the work and duties of it, together with his blessing upon your endeavours to succeed them, and upon your enjoyments to sweeten them to you. When the evening comes, end your day with God, make him the* Omega *as well as the* Alpha; *pay him the tribute of Praise for the Mercies you received, beg the continuance of his favour; so may you lie down in peace, and comfortably expect a being shadowed with his wing, and having sleep given you as to his beloved Ones, while the Hedge of his Protection is set about your Persons, Families, and all that you*

have

have. Upon the Lord's day, get alone, and do all you can to pray your selves into an holy and heavenly frame, fit for the Duties and Ordinances of it; beg his Presence with you, and in them, and a sight of his Power and Glory; and that there he would give you of his Love, and kiss you with the kisses of his mouth. Never dare to come to the publick Assemblies, till you have been with the Great Master of them, who alone can bless his Provisions to your refreshing and nourishment, and fasten his Truths in your Heads and Hearts, as a Nail in a sure place. Pray that he who hath the Key of David, *would open the Minister's mouth, and your hearts, giving him the* Tongue of the Learned, *and you the* Ear of the Obedient, *both prepare the Seed, and likewise fit the Soil. And when you return from the Congregation to your own House, there set upon Prayer again, and so cover the Seed that is sown, and earnestly desire of God, That as he did enable you to mingle Faith with the Word that was delivered, so he would grant you to love and practice it. The Life in Heaven will be a Life of Praise; O let our Life on Earth be a Life of Prayer: There our Souls will have an Eternal Repose in him; Here let our Souls follow hard after him.*

But

But this Epistle swells too big, 'tis high time to draw to a Close. My last request and Prayer for you all is, That you may be saved, and that you may work out your Salvation with fear and trembling. If you and I get to Heaven at last, it matters not what storms we meet with here. It is but a little while, and all our hard work and sharp conflicts, and sour afflictions will have an end; and then we shall see God, and manage Everlasting Triumphs, sinning and sighing, waiting and weeping no more. Watch while you live in the midst of Enemies; walk while you have the light, and mind your work while you have any to do. Husband your time, improve your seasons, trade with your Talents, fill your Relations with Duty, and in all things adorn the Doctrine of our God and Saviour. It is your professed desire to enjoy pure Ordinances and an holy Communion: Oh that there may be none among you that profane those Ordinances, and pollute that Communion! First look to your hearts, then to your ways, and make and keep both as clean as you can. Be much in minding your selves, not in censuring others; their infirmities do you pity, and labour to get your own healed. Your stay and mine here is not like to be long; and we need not care how short it is, so the great work for which we were sent, be finished before we go. When we

are once in Heaven, we shall not need the World, and the Church will not need us; for God hath the residue of the Spirit, and can set others in our places, who shall fill them better than we have done. While I am continued among you, I shall, by Grace assisting, make it my business to help your Faith and Joy; do you work together with me, and God with us all. Be friends to your selves, and one another; why are you brought into an holy Communion, but in order to mutual edification? And our life is not to be measured so much by the multitude of days, or plenty of enjoyments, as by usefulness. He that doth most service, shall have the greatest commendation, and weightiest Crown. Now commending you to God, and the Word of his Grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an Inheritance among all them which are sanctified, I rest

From my Study,
Novemb. 24. 1690.

Your Servant for
Jesus sake,

SAMUEL SLATER.

MATTHEW *VI.* 6.

But thou, when thou prayeſt, enter into thy Cloſet, and when thou haſt ſhut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in ſecret.

THeſe words are a little part of our dear Saviour's firſt Sermon, and the longeſt that ever he Preached; full of excellent matter, moſt worthy of the *Preacher*, moſt proper and profitable for the *Hearers*; it abounds with wholeſom and excellent Counſels, and affords moſt precious and cordial Comforts. They that would taſte his Comforts, muſt follow his Counſels; and as they deſire that Chriſt would admit them into Heaven when they dye; they muſt be very careful while they live, to obſerve and practice what he taught while he was here upon Earth. Learn of him as a Prophet, if you would be advanced by him as *King*.

In the beginning of this Chapter, he commands his Diſciples and Followers *to take heed.* Caution becomes Chriſtians, their Caſe calls loudly for it; the life which they live in the fleſh, requires a great deal of caution for the leading of it, that it might not be a vain and empty life, a low and unworthy life; and the duties of Religion, to the doing of which they are engaged, requires as much, that they may not be ſpoiled by them, nor rejected by God; nor thrown as dung into their faces. Take heed, O Profeſſors, how you live, and walk and carry in the World; weigh all your actions, and ponder the path of your feet. Take heed what you hear, and how you hear; take heed how you pray, for what, and in what manner; take heed how you converſe, and with whom; take heed how you eat and drink, and buy and ſell; how you think and ſpeak: Take heed that you avoid all ſinful things, and that you do not ſin in any lawful things. There is a great deal of unſeen danger, there is a multitude of ſnares ſubtilly and privily laid; and we are very prone to miſcarry, to fall into thoſe dangers, and be caught in thoſe ſnares: We have need to be circumſpect and wary. Take heed therefore, remembering and conſidering, He gives the charge, who

who loves you dearly, and knows better than you what need there is of it.

Our Lord in particular gives this direction and caution concerning the ordinary works of *Alms-giving* and *Prayer*, and that extraordinary duty of *Fasting*: all which are so good and excellent in themselves, that he would not have them spoil'd by any of his Servants, whatever they are by others, who will needs pretend to him, while they have no more of him than the name; and that which as to these things he doth in general caution them about, is, *That they be not as the Hypocrites.* Hypocrisy is a thing exceeding odious unto God. An Ape is most like a Man, but is not one; and of all creatures he is most deformed. An Hypocrite is of all others most like a Saint, but is not; and of all Sinners he is most hateful. He shall not stand before God, but be banished furthest from him: The worst, darkest, hottest place in Hell, is his apartment. God doth so much loath Hypocrites, that he doth not allow his Children to resemble them. He would not have them to be Hypocrites; nay, he would not have them to be *as* Hypocrites: When thou giv'st Alms, do not sound a Trumpet *as the Hypocrites do*; Instead of letting the *world*, do not let thy *left hand* know what thy right

hand doth. When thou prayeſt, thou ſhalt not be *as* the Hypocrites are, for they love to pray ſtanding in the Synagogues: They do not love to do good, without having many Witneſſes of the good they do: As if that Duty were loſt from which they do not reap the praiſe of Men. When thou faſteſt, be not as the Hypocrites, of a ſad countenance: They love to put on a ſour face; but never look after nor care for a broken and contrite heart. Thus our Lord and Maſter would not have his followers to conform to them; Do not faſhion your ſelves like them; get not into their mode and dreſs, though it ſeem great and handſome; Be ye followers of God, as dear Children, in all things; Keep as cloſe to him as ever you can. Put on the Lord Jeſus, be ye cloathed all over with Chriſt; That as near as may be, nothing but Chriſt, and his Spirit, and Vertues, may be ſeen in you; but be not like the Hypocrites in any thing. An Hypocrite loſeth all he doth, and will be himſelf rejected.

In the words which we have under our conſideration, you find the direction which our Saviour gives concerning Prayer afterward, an excellent pattern to frame it by; here's an excellent Rule. In the former Verſe, He had taken notice of the guiſe or man-

manner of the *Hypocrites* in thoſe days, *They loved to pray ſtanding in the Synagogues, and in the corners of the ſtreets*, in open and frequented places, where they were ſure not to fail of Spectators and Obſervers of their Devotion, who would, as they hoped, tell what they had ſeen, and cry them up as perſons eminent for their Piety, though that was a thing of which they had no more than the ſhew. Thus they had meerly an external Religion, unto the practice whereof, they were carried out only by external conſiderations. It was not a Spring within, but Weights without, that ſet their Wheels a going. The *end* that they in all aim'd at, was *to be ſeen of men*, that among them they might raiſe a name, obtain credit and applauſe, and be accounted ſomebodies for Religion, though they knew themſelves to be no other than Cheats. Chriſt tells us the iſſue hereof; they do not miſs the mark, but catch what they fiſh for. *Verily they have their reward*; there is none to come, none laid up for them in Heaven, they have it now, in this preſent time, all that is good of it; Glory, but a vain glory; a Name, but nothing elſe; they get an eſteem with ignorant men, who are as empty as themſelves; they are reckoned great Men, Who but they for their Sanctity?

And let them have it, and bleſs themſelves in it: But thou who loveſt thy Soul, and deſireſt to be indeed a gainer by thy Religion, *enter thou into thy Cloſet when thou prayeſt*; run not into a corner of a Street, but ſome nook or corner of the Houſe; *and when thou haſt* (not opened thy Caſement, but) *ſhut thy door, pray to thy Father.*

We may rationally look upon Chriſt, as ſuppoſing that all who call themſelves, and would be by others accounted Chriſtians, do pray; that every one who counts it his honour to take up that Name, will alſo reckon himſelf obliged to take up that work. And indeed it is a contradiction for any Man to ſay that he is a Chriſtian, and yet live a Prayerleſs Life; no Man can have a Spirit of Holineſs given him, who doth not pour out his Soul unto God in Prayer. It is as poſſible to find an Holy Devil in Hell, as a prayerleſs Saint upon Earth. *Paul* was no ſooner thrown to the ground, but we have him upon his Knees; no ſooner a Convert, but a Supplicant: Grace cannot poſſibly be in that Man's heart, who lives without Prayer in the World. Chriſt takes it then for granted, that Diſciples will pray; when they can do nothing elſe, they will do that: If they be in the furthermoſt parts of the Earth, they will from thence ſend up a cry

to

to Heaven. *Jonah* thought the Belly of the Fiſh, in which he was, to be the Belly of Hell; yet there he did pray, and reſolve to look toward God's Holy Temple. So then, I ſay, our Saviour takes it for granted, that thoſe who are his Diſciples do pray; and therefore here he only gives them counſel and advice for the right management of it, that they might not, through ſome fatal miſtake, loſe their labour, ſpend their breath to no purpoſe, offend the God whom they ſeek; and inſtead of obtaining a bleſſing from him, pull down wrath and a curſe upon their own heads. Do not you in your Prayer fly ſo low a pitch as to make eſteem with Men your end, either the whole or any part of your end. Do not aim at vain glory; ſuppoſe by that means you may get a Name, that gain will not make you rich; a Name you may have, but ſuch an one as will rot and periſh. A great noiſe you may make in the World, but it will be an empty ſound: And what will you be the better for that? A little popular breath may ſwell and puff you up; but it will not raiſe you any thing nearer to God and Heaven, nor blow you on any faſter to the Port of Glory. It is no matter how much there is of privacy in your Prayer, ſo that there be ſincerity and purity

too, nor how ſecretly it goeth up to God, ſo that it doth not go out of feigned Lips. When others are altogether for the Synagogues and Streets, Do thou, O Chriſtian, enter into thy Cloſet, or Chamber, and ſhut thy door about thee; do thou take pleaſure in thy retirements. When no body ſees, thy God doth, yea, and he loves to ſee; and when no body hears, thy God doth; and what he hears, he likes; thy Prayers, thy Sighs, thy Groans are his Muſick: Only I deſire that this may be remembred, That while Chriſt doth here command and enjoyn ſecret duty, it is not any part of his purpoſe to exclude or take us from publick; only he would ſhut out and ſeparate Vanity and Pride from both. That point of Doctrine, which from hence I ſhall raiſe and diſcourſe upon, is this:

Doct. Cloſet, or Secret Prayer, is an excellent and advantageous duty, which all the People of God ought to be very much in the performance of; when you are alone, and have no body with you, then be you with God. At a night, when you are in Bed, *commune with your hearts*, and be ſtill; turn your eyes inward before ſleep cloſeth them; and before you go to Bed, ſpend ſome time in ſeeking of, and communing with

with your God. Take your leave of your Friends and Relations; or, if you pleaſe, ſteal away from them, that you and your God may be together. When upon an expreſs command given him by God himſelf, *Abraham* went to offer up his only and dearly beloved Son *Iſaac*, Geneſis 22. 5. *He ſaid unto his young men, Abide here with the Aſs, and I and the Lad will go yonder and worſhip, and come again to you.* He feared that if they went with him, they would be an hinderance to him, and therefore would not admit of their Company. So let worldly buſineſs be laid aſide, and acquaintance ſet at a diſtance, while you go by your ſelves to perform acts of Worſhip, and to pour out your requeſts into the boſome of your Heavenly Father. Think not that I ſpeak againſt *Publick Prayer*, for God loveth the Gates of *Zion*, and Chriſt walks in the Golden Candleſticks; when his people are met together in his name, he will be in the midſt of them. Nor am I for your caſting off Family Prayer; there is a Prayer upon record in Scripture againſt prayerleſs Families, calling for wrath to be poured out by God upon them. Both theſe kinds of Prayers ought to be preſented, let them not be neglected. Secret Prayer is a choice part of your work too, be not any of you want-

ing to it. In the handling of this point, I ſhall firſt lay down theſe four propoſitions:

1. *Firſt*, Prayer in general is the Chriſtians duty; a burthen laid upon us by God himſelf. It is very much commanded in the Word, and the Precept of it frequently repeated, *Matt.* 26. 41. *Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation.* 1 Theſſ. 5. 17. *Pray without ceaſing.* 1 Tim. 2. 8. *I will that men pray every where*, without wrath or doubting. And in *Matt.* 18. 1. *Our Saviour ſpake a parable to them to this end, that men ought always to pray, and not to faint.* You ſhould be continually in a praying frame, having your Graces and Affections ready; and you ſhould be frequent in the Work. This is a piece of natural worſhip, the very Law of our Creation doth oblige us to it; and the light of Nature (though it be now ſince the Fall exceeding dim, and like a Candle burnt down into the Socket) hath directed the Heathens themſelves to the performance of it: They, when in a menacing Storm, and *Jonah* faſt a-ſleep in the Ship, could go and awaken him, and bid him to call upon his God.

Prayer is what we owe to God, not only as we are Chriſtians, but likewiſe as we are crea-

creatures; not only as Saints, but alſo as Men and Women. It is a part of that homage which we ought to pay to him, as we had our Being from his Power, and as we have that Being continued and ſweetned to us by his Goodneſs. In a word, It is a practical acknowledgment of that neceſſary and conſtant dependence we have upon him. So that the Man or Woman who doth not pray, is no better than an Atheiſt, both in Heart and Life. He doth firſt caſt off God who caſts off Prayer, *Pſal.* 14. 1. The *fool* firſt ſaith in his heart, *there is no God*; and then you find in *verſ.* 3, 4. That he doth not ſeek God, nor call upon him. Let Men and Women make never ſo great and fair a profeſſion, attribute to themſelves what they will, and lay their claim to as many glorious Names and Titles as they pleaſe, their Profeſſion is no better than a Lye; thoſe Names and Titles do not at all belong to them; and the Religion unto which they pretend, is no other than a lifeleſs Image, which God, when he awakes, will moſt certainly deſpiſe, in caſe they live without this excellent duty. You may call and count them Atheiſts, without doing them any injury. Thoſe that live without Prayer in the World, are the Men and Women that live without God in the World; and if they;

they live without God in this World, you may eaſily know with whom they ſhall live in that World which is to come.

Some may be apt to think it a thing impoſſible for any Atheiſts to be found in *London*, where there is ſo much Knowledg, ſuch plenty of Means, ſuch a great and glorious Light ſhining; but I fear, if there were an enquiry made, it would plainly appear there are more of them than we do imagine; yea, I am not in the leaſt afraid to affirm, that in this famous City there are the greateſt and vileſt Atheiſts in the World. The Lord himſelf ſaith, *Iſa.* 42. 14. *Who is blind but my ſervant? or deaf as my meſſenger that I ſent? Who is blind as He that is perfect, or blind as the Lord's ſervant?* As if he ſhould have ſaid, There is no reaſon to wonder at the ignorance and blindneſs which is among the Heathen who live in the dark places of the Earth, when there is ſuch blindneſs among my Servants, both Prophets and People, who have their habitations in a Land of Light, a Valley of Viſion. There are none ſo blind, as thoſe who are blinded by the Sun, and have their Eyes put out by that very light by which they ſhould ſee. None ſo blind as thoſe that will not ſee; none ſo ignorant as thoſe that will not learn and know. Firſt Men do wickedly

ſhut

ſhut their own eyes, and then God doth in juſt judgment put them out. *Iſa.* 6. 9. *Go, and tell this People, Hear ye indeed, but underſtand not; ſee ye indeed, but perceive not; make the heart of this People fat, and make their ears heavy, and ſhut their eyes; leſt they ſee with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and underſtand with their hearts, and convert and be healed.*

But know that in the firſt place; remember and conſider it. *Prayer is abſolutely your duty:* charge it upon your ſelves, and make conſcience of minding and doing it: you are obliged to it both as you are Chriſtians and Creatures; it is a part of your reaſonable ſervice: and your neglect of it will never diſcharge and deliver you from your engagement to it. If you do not pay it, the Debt goes on; the Sin increaſes; and how great a ſum will it at laſt amount to! every day that you paſs without your Morning and Evening Sacrifice, you do feloniouſly rob God of that glory which is due to his Name, and wickedly tranſgreſs the Law of your Creation.

2. *Secondly*, As Prayer it ſelf is your duty, ſo a liberty to pray is your choice privilege. It is God's mercy, and your happineſs, that he gives you leave to knock at his Door, and lie begging there. Sit down here, and pauſe a little, and ſeriouſly think with

with your selves, how great a matter it is for a poor contemptible Worm to have the Ear of the Infinite and Glorious God open to its cry: for you, who are no better (as *Abraham* freely acknowledged) than dust and ashes, to have the door of Grace opened to you, and leave to approach, and make your application to the Majesty of Heaven, and to state your case to him, and to spread all your desires before him, and to pour out your requests and groans into his Bosome at any time, and as often as you please, so that you come in a right manner, and behave your selves with a becoming reverence, and godly fear. Converse and Communion with God was the happiness of innocent Man. So long as our first Parents persisted in that pure and perfect state in which they were created, they could think of God with rejoycing, contemplate his Glory with delight, and walk with him as Friends: But all this was forfeited and lost by the Fall. Sin, at its first entry, broke that harmony; it cloathed God with terror, and Man with shame; his confidence was gone, and horror took its place; so that instead of fellowship with God, man fled from him, and would have hid, had he known how, and where. Sin presently erected a middle-wall of partition between them. It would have been

been fatal to man, and as much as his life was worth, to have adventur'd in his lapsed state into the presence of God, whom he had highly provoked, had there not been help laid upon one that is mighty, and the gracious interposition of a powerful and prevailing Mediator.

God is in himself a devouring fire, and everlasting burnings. How then is it safe for man to approach to him, or to dwell with him, since he is of a plasant Plant become no better than a Briar, a Thorn, dried Stubble, fit for the burning? how well might guilty Sinners *call* (with them in the 6th of the *Revelations*, v. 16.) *to the Mountains and Rocks to fall upon them, and hide them from the face of him that sitteth upon the Throne?* But the beloved and ever-blessed Son of God, in a most gracious compliance with, and pursuance of his Father's will, hath restored unto man freedom of access to God. Jesus Christ, though He knew full well how great the attempt was, and how much it would stand him in, did put his life in his hand, and engaged his heart to approach unto God; and being our peace, hath procured for us a liberty of approaching too, and of drawing nigh, going as near as we will, even to his very Throne, *Heb.* 10. 19, 20. *Having therefore, brethren,*

bold

boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us through the veil, that is to say, his flesh. Christ entred into the holiest of all, he entred in triumph as one that had conquered all his Enemies; He entred with joy as one that had finished the work, and sate down at the right hand of God, to take there his everlasting rest; and (as you have it in the 9th of the *Hebrews*, v. 12.) *He entred not by the blood of Calves and Goats, but by his own blood.* He carried that along with him; and now by that Blood we may enter too, we may enter with safety, there is no danger for a gracious person, a believing Soul: Though the Throne of God be a Throne of Glory, yet is it a Throne of Grace, a Mercy-seat, that hath a Rain-bow round about it; and because we enter with *safety*, therefore we may enter with *boldness*, both with a freedom of speech, telling God all that is in our hearts; and with the full assurance of Faith, as those that shall find mercy and grace to accept, and help in time of need. Now if that any of you do not value this privilege at an high rate, if you do not carefully improve it, and make use of it now it hath been purchased by Christ for poor Sinners; you deal very disingenuously, do not well consider the inestimable price which it cost

coſt, and you offer a moſt vile and wretched affront to the precious Blood of *Jeſus*, as if it were an unholy thing, of no more excellency than that of a Beaſt, a common and ordinary man, or of a guilty and death-deſerving Criminal.

3. *Thirdly*, All the ſorts of holy Prayer are to be made uſe of, *Eph.* 6. 18. *Praying always with all prayer in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perſeverance, and ſupplication for all Saints.* Your Prayers muſt be in the Spirit: that is, with your Spirit; Prayer muſt not only be a Lip-labour, but the work of the heart; the words in Prayer are but the carcaſe of the duty; the fervour and heat of the Affections, are the life and ſoul of it: and alſo it muſt be with the Holy Spirit, whoſe work it is to help his peoples Infirmities, and to make interceſſion in them: Prayer muſt be by the influence and aſſiſtance of the Divine Spirit, and with the heat and earneſtneſs of our own ſpirits: ſo then we are to pray in the Spirit, or, as *Jude* ſaith, *in the Holy Ghoſt*: and happy they who have not fallible men to make their Prayers for them, but the Spirit of God: but there are two other Expreſſions in the forementioned Scripture we ought to take a little notice of. *Praying always*, Do not underſtand it as if you were to be day

and

and night at it, as if praying were the whole of your duty, for you have a great deal of other work to do, which must be carefully attended, and therefore the Original is, ἐν παντὶ καιρῷ: in all opportunities, in every fit and proper season for prayer: in every condition into which Providence casts you, and upon every occasion that calls for it: The other Expression most pertinent to our present business, is, διὰ πάσης προσευχῆς καὶ δεήσεως, *with all prayer and supplication*, i. e. with ordinary prayer, and with extraordinary too, that which hath fasting joined with it: private prayer and publick too; ejaculatory prayer, when the Soul sallies out on a sudden unto God, gives him a visit, and away, knocks at his door, puts in a short Petition, and is gone, like one that is engaged about some other business, and cannot stay: and also composed Prayer, in which the Soul fixeth and abides some considerable time with God: Family-prayer, and Closet-prayer; Prayer in conjunction with others, and alone by our selves. We may, and must, make use of all these kinds of Prayers as opportunity offers, and occasions do require. But to come more close to the matter in hand.

4. *Fourthly*, Secret Prayer is a duty incumbent upon Christians. Now that we

call

call *ſecret Prayer*, when a perſon gets alone by himſelf, and makes his requeſts known to God. When being ſequeſtred from all company whatſoever, and withdrawn from his neareſt and deareſt Relations, his moſt familiar and intimate Friends, and by himſelf in a moſt cloſe and private retirement, he ſends out his Soul upon the wings of holy and fervent deſires, and labours with all his might to fetch down his God to him by his gracious preſence, and to obtain of him thoſe favours and bleſſings of which he finds a ſenſible want, either in whole, or in part. It is that by which he knocks at the gate of Heaven, and goeth into the Holieſt of all, and gives his heavenly Father a viſit in ſuch a manner as that no body may know of it. Not that he is aſhamed of what he doth, for he is free to own God for his Sovereign Lord, Chriſt for his dearly beloved, Prayer as his duty and work, before all the World, though he be reproached, ſcorned and maligned for it; but becauſe he would avoid the ſuſpicion of a *Phariſaical* vain glorious Spirit, and alſo that he might get as far as ever he can, out of the reach of Impediments and Diverſions: He enters into his Chamber, and there ſhuts his Door upon him, that ſo he might ſhut out all that would interrupt and

diſturb

diſturb that fellowſhip with his God which he hath ſo often found an incomparable ſweetneſs in, as that he counts it his Heaven upon Earth. At other times he will make one of the great Congregation, *and go to the Houſe of God with the voice of joy and praiſe, with a multitude that keep holy-day*, Pſal. 42. 4. he loves the Gates of *Sion*, *and to behold the beauty of the Lord, and to enquire in his Temple*, Pſal. 27. 4 and alſo he knows how to go out, as *Iſaac* did, into the Fields to meditate; and in the night ſeaſon to be abroad, and conſider, with *David*, the Heavens, which are the works of God's hand, the Moon and the Stars which he hath created, and ſo take ſome turns in an holy fellowſhip; and, as *Enoch* did, *walk with God*, before he be removed from hence, and taken up to the habitation of his Holineſs and Glory, the Chamber of his preſence; and in theſe Walks he finds his heart warmed, and an holy fire kindled, and then returns with that burning within him; then he ſpeaks with his Tongue, and ſends up a pure flame of earneſt ſupplications.

Confident I am, The excellency of this courſe will not be in the leaſt queſtion'd by any who believe there is a God, and own that abſolute and neceſſary dependence, which both as Creatures and Chriſtians we have

have upon him, and who have any ſenſe of Religion upon their Souls: yea, I believe it will be acknowledged a duty by many, very many of thoſe who yet do not themſelves live in the performance of it: there hath ſuch a clear light broken in upon them, as hath convinced their Judgments, though that conviction hath not had power enough upon their wills, as to bring them to the practice of it. And for my own part, I do not know ſo much as the ſhadow of a reaſon why it ſhould be queſtion'd, and made a point of controverſie: This I do with a fulneſs of perſuaſion aſſert, That if there be any ſuch thing in the World as a duty which we owe to God, ſecret Prayer is ſo. And I do add this, wiſhing thoſe (into whoſe hands this little Piece ſhall come) ſeriouſly to think of it; thoſe perſons that do not make conſcience hereof, let them make never ſo great a noiſe, do indeed make conſcience of nothing. He is not a true Chriſtian that is not a through Chriſtian; nor he a real Diſciple that hath not a cordial reſpect to all that Chriſt commands him; and I ſhall not at all wonder to ſee or hear that man is remiſs and careleſs and negligent in other things, for which at preſent he pretends a zeal, and at the long run to throw up all. Yea, and I will venture

to add this one thing further; He that doth not seek God when he is alone, hath no reason to promise himself God's gracious meeting with him when he is in Company; but if you will exclude, and shut God out of your Chamber and Closets, you will not to your comfort, though indeed you may to your terrour, find him in the Congregation. The only thing which I shall do more in the doctrinal part, will be to prove the Point; and in order thereunto, I shall endeavour with all convenient brevity to shew, That secret Prayer is,

I. A Duty.

II. An Advantage.

I begin with the former of these. Private or secret Prayer is a great duty, which all that call themselves Christians, ought to be much in the performance of. For the evidencing of this to you, I shall lay down these four things.

1. *First*, Secret Prayer was the practice of our blessed Lord Jesus; as he came into the World to redeem us, so to direct us: as his Death was an expiatory Sacrifice, so his Life was a leading Example. He is that excellent Copy without blot, after which we are to write; and that most exact and perfect Pattern, without blemish or defect, the imitation whereof we are obliged to stu-

dy

dy and endeavour, and that to our utmoſt; we muſt lead his Life as near as ever we can, and tread in his ſteps, for that is to foot it right; and we muſt ſhew forth his virtues; there muſt be an impreſs of them upon our diſpoſitions and converſations. *The ſame mind ought to be in us that was in him, Phil.* 2. 5. Then is a Chriſtian in his beauty and glory, when he is cloathed with Chriſt, and ſhines with the beams of Chriſt.

Now Chriſt was very much in the work of ſecret Prayer, and exceedingly frequent at it. How did his perfectly pure and precious ſoul delight to be on the wing, and mounting up to his and our Father in his receſſes? He did not only teach his Diſciples to pray, giving them in this Chapter a moſt excellent pattern for them to draw theirs by; nor did he only pray with them, as Maſter of the Family; but he likewiſe did many and many a time pray by himſelf alone, a great deal oftner than we do, or any in the world ever did know of; but ſomething to this purpoſe, hath been by the Divine Spirit (who guided the Holy Penmen) put upon Record in the Sacred Scripture, Thus in *Matt.* 14. 23. after he had wrought that great and amazing Miracle of feeding five thouſand Men, beſide Women and Children, when he had no more proviſion than

five

five Loaves, and two Fishes: He sent the Multitude away; and not being satisfied with *their absence alone*, he would have *his very Disciples* go by Ship to the other side: it is said, *he constrained them to go*: poor hearts! they loved him dearly, and nowhere enjoyed themselves so well as they did when they were in his company, and therefore they were loath to leave him; but he would have it so, he order'd and commanded them to be gone; but what was the matter? what did our Lord do when they were all gone? That Text tells you, *He went up into a mountain a-part to pray, and when the evening was come, he was there alone.* He had his Father with him, and doubtless a multitude of the heavenly Hoast, the glorious Angels attending and waiting, but nobody else; none of the multitude, not so much as one single Disciple. Now let me desire you to think seriously of this; that it was far otherwise with Christ, than it is with the best of us. He had another manner of command over his mind and heart, his thoughts and Affections, than the most gracious Man or Woman upon Earth hath. He could with the greatest ease imaginable keep his Soul close to, and intent upon the business which was before him, without the smallest diversion and extravagancy; and

yet he chose to be a part from all, and alone by himself when he prayed unto his Father: and shall not we go and do likewise? Sure that which Christ did, was very well done. You have another Scripture which holds out the same, and refers to another time, when he had healed *Simon's* Wife's Mother, who lay sick of a Fever, and many others that were diseased, and had cast out many Devils. *Mark* 1. 35. *In the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed.* Hypocrites, as you have heard, chuse the corners of the Streets, places of concourse; go into the Abbeys and Cathedrals, and there you will see them by a Pillar at their devotion; but Christ chose solitariness, ἐρημον τοπον, a desert, lonely place, where there was no body, there he loved to meet his Father. Take but one Text more, which you have in *Luke* 22. 39, 40. *He came out, and went, as he was wont, to the Mount of Olives, and his Disciples followed him; and when he was come to the place, he said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation.* First, he set them to their work: he knew that the Devil would quickly be at his work, and Christ would have his Disciples be at their work first. We are then least in danger, when a danger comes and finds us

at our work. Christ knew that an hour of temptation was coming, and he would have them lay up Prayer against that hour. Will Satan tempt? then do you pray; thus he setteth them at work: if you ask what Christ did then do himself? I answer, You may be sure he was not idle; what he bid them do, he did; but he did it alone; *He was withdrawn from them about a stones cast, and kneeled down and prayed.* This was Christ's wont, as to go to the Mount of Olives, so to get alone and pray, not having so much as any of his Disciples with him. Now is not this a plain evidence of the thing? and shall not this be a prevailing motive with you? In my mind, the practice of Christ should be a powerful and cogent Argument with all those that call themselves his people.

2. *Secondly*, The people of God in their several Ages and Generations have taken the same course, and walked in the same way; I mean, all those whose hearts have been upright with God; and the desires of their Souls have been to his name, and the remembrance of him, and communion with him. *Jacob* was a plain man, but a great wrestler, and very famous for his skill in that holy and excellent Art, and crowned he was with admirable success. He *wrestled* with God, and *prevail'd* like a Prince; tho

he

he got a *lameneſs*, which he carried with him to his Grave, yet he got a *bleſſing* which kept him company into the other World, and he was alone at the work, *Gen.* 32. 22, *&c. He took his two Wives, and his two Women-ſervants, and his eleven Sons, and ſent them over the Brook; and being left alone, he wreſtled with the Angel till the break of day:* it is, by the way, ſaid, there was a man wreſtled with him, who was no other than the Lord Chriſt, who, ſaith Dr. *Lightfoot*, ſought to kill him for his diffidence, and for his ſending a Preſent to his Brother *Eſau*, before he had, according to his Vow, paid the Tythe to God: But be that how it will, this is plain, He prayed when he was alone; then he wept, and made ſupplication. When that *Rebeccah* had conceived, and there were Twins in her Womb, which fell to ſtruggling, God thereby ſhewing that Contention which would afterward be between them: and it is ſaid, *Gen.* 25, 22, *She went thereupon to enquire of the Lord:* which indeed, according to the Opinion of ſome Learned Men, was by conſulting of ſome Prophet; but I rather think, according to the judgment of others, ſhe did apply her ſelf to God immediately, and conſulted, or enquired of him in a way of Secret Prayer: And that it was ſo, ſeems to be evident

from the 25th verſe, which tells us, ſhe had her anſwer from God himſelf; *The Lord ſaid unto her, Two nations are in thy womb*; i. e. two Heads of Nations: *and two manner of people ſhall be ſeparated from thy bowels*; ſo that the good Woman got alone to pray and ſeek the Lord. We do alſo read in *Gen.* 25. 22. That *Abraham planted a Grove in* Beerſheba, *and there he called on the Name of the Lord, the Everlaſting God.* He ſingly, and by himſelf. *Jonathan* ſaith, that Grove was an Orchard full of Fruit-trees, which did afford both what was pleaſant and grateful to the taſte, and a comfortable refreſhing ſhade in that hot Countrey; but that is only a *Jewiſh* Tradition: This we learn from the Text, That thither he was wont to retire himſelf for prayer; that was his Oratory when he had a mind to be alone. When *Elijah* was by *Jezebel* threatned with death, he came to *Beerſheba*, and left his Servant there; but 1 *Kings* 19. 4. *He himſelf went into the Wilderneſs a days journey, and ſate under a Juniper-tree, and he requeſted for himſelf that he might die, and ſaid, It is enough now, O Lord, that I die, for I am not better than my Fathers.* He would have no body with him, not ſo much as a Friend, no not his Servant. Once more, in *Acts* 10. 9. it is ſaid, *Peter went up upon the houſe-top to pray,*

about

about the ſixth hour: not then with the Family in which he was, nor with any of his Brethren; but by himſelf, at the top of the Houſe, upon the Leads, in the open air, from whence he might look toward the Temple at *Jeruſalem*, and be remote from all Company and Spectators: ſo that you ſee what hath been the practice of theſe gracious perſons, whoſe Names ſtand upon Scripture-record; and I dare ſay, all the Saints who have been acquainted with God, have been familiarly acquainted with this work too; and now I ſay, Do you go and do the ſame; and in this be ye, as well as in other things, followers of them, conſidering the moſt happy end of their holy converſation.

3. *Thirdly*, There is an expreſs and ſpecial command that binds this upon you as your duty. Our dear and precious *Jeſus*, who hath bought us, and ſo is our Lord and Maſter, hath directed us to this practice, and in plain terms required it at our hands: for the proof of this, we will go no further, for we need no more than the Text before us. *Thou, when thou prayeſt, enter into thy Cloſet, and when thou haſt ſhut thy door*, make all as cloſe and private as thou canſt, when thou art ſo alone, as that no body can come at thee, then *pray to thy Father*. I told you before, and think it worth my while, be-

cauſe it may be profitable for you, to repeat it, and tell you again, That our Lord Jeſus doth ſuppoſe thee to be one that feareth God, and that makeſt Prayer thy buſineſs; He takes it here for granted, that the new Nature thou haſt received, will act like it ſelf: and therefore though he doth in other places command you to do it, yet He doth not do ſo here, but ſuppoſeth it: and ſurely every man that is himſelf, doth pray. He that is a man of ſenſe and wiſdom, will be a man of prayer. He that doth not pray, is a Mad-man. He hath not the underſtanding of a man; he doth not act according to the dictate of his own reaſon, which, if conſulted, would certainly put him upon it, as a thing highly due to God, and every way advantageous to man. Chriſt therefore doth here ſuppoſe you do pray: and therefore doth only direct you as to the manner, and that in this one particular.

And I do likewiſe deſire you to obſerve, That our Lord Jeſus doth here ſpeak in the Second Perſon, Singular, *Thou*, in the ſame language, with the ſame particular application, and awful Majeſty, as the Ten Commandments were given forth: thus you know they run; Thou *ſhalt have no other Gods before me*; Thou *ſhalt make to thy ſelf no graven Image*; Thou *ſhalt not take the name of the Lord*

Lord thy God in vain; *Remember that* thou *keep holy the Sabbath-day*. So here, Thou, *when* thou *prayeſt*. Chriſt would have every one that nameth his Name, that takes upon him the Profeſſion of being one of his People, to make a particular application of this to himſelf, and to look upon this counſel as given, and this charge as laid upon him. Thou, *Thomas*, when thou prayeſt, do this; and thou *John*, when thou prayeſt, do this; and ſo, thou *Matthew*, and thou *Andrew*; and ſo every one that was then alive, or that ſhall live in any Age or place of the World. It is ſpoken to you, and to me, and to all: do *thou* enter into thy Chamber, *thou* alone, and ſhut the door upon thee, not upon others with thee, but upon thee, and *ſo* pray unto thy Father; get *alone*, ſaith Chriſt, and pray *alone*: do it when there is no body by, none to ſee thee, none to overhear thee. God and an holy Soul are very good company, when it goes out with tears, and he meets it with ſmiles: when it draws up its Confeſſions, and he ſeals its Pardons: it breathes out holy deſires and longings, and he affords it gracious anſwers, and in them ſatisfactions: it ſtates its caſe, tells its Diſeaſes, open its Sores, and he applies eaſing and healing remedies. In a word, When the Soul fires

its Sacrifice, and then in the holy flame thereof the bleſſed Angel of the Covenant doth wonderfully. It is oftentimes good for the Saints to go one with another into the preſence of their Father; they have been called upon to ſtrive together in prayer, and that in Family duties, or in publick Ordinances, or in caſes of common concernment; but there is no Chriſtian, who hath not his own wants, and his own preſſures, and his own bitterneſſes, and upon theſe accounts it is beſt for him to go alone: and thou canſt not tell, O holy Soul, what ſpecial favour God may ſhew thee, what token of love he may put into thy hand, when there is no body by. When diſconſolate *Hannah* had been watering her plants, weeping greatly alone, pouring out her Soul in tears and prayers before the Lord, ſhe had ſuch an impreſs upon her Spirit, ſuch a meſſage of peace whiſper'd to her, as made her glad at heart, and on a ſudden dried up all her tears, ſo that *her countenance was no more ſad.* Thou, if thou engageſt in this work in thine uprightneſs, mayſt believingly and comfortably expect the ſame in God's time. However, ſet this down with thy ſelf, and act accordingly, That Secret Prayer is thy unqueſtionable duty by virtue of a Divine Command.

4. *Laſtly,*

4. *Laſtly*, There is a very gracious promiſe made to Secret Prayer: and here I ſhall lay down this Aſſertion as worthy your taking notice of; That the great God doth not make promiſes to any thing, which he doth not require, and which is not acceptable and pleaſing to him, and which accordingly is not duty in man: Promiſes do follow Precepts, and are deſigned for the ſtrengthening of our hearts and hands, the encouraging us to Acts of Obedience, and the ſweetning thoſe Obediential Acts to us. He is angry at thoſe, who offer to do thoſe things in matters of his Worſhip, for which they have not his Warrant. Hence ſuch enquiry as this; *Iſa.* 1. 12. *Who hath required this at your hands? viz.* to come in ſuch a manner. And hence alſo that Complaint and Charge; *That they burn their Sons and Daughters in the fire*, made a Sacrifice of them, which as he ſaith, *Jer.* 7. 31. *He commanded them not, neither entred it into his heart. David's* Deſign was good, and it pleaſed God that he had an heart ſo ſet for his honour, yet it was a rebuke and check to him that God ſent him this meſſage by *Nathan*, 2 Sam. 7. 7. *In all the places, wherein I have walked with the Children of* Iſrael, *ſpake I a word with any of the Tribes of* Iſrael, *whom I commanded to feed my people* Iſrael, *ſaying, Why*

build ye not me an houſe of Cedar? From whence, ſaith *Peter Martyr*, we learn, that *David* failed in attempting ſuch a thing, when he had not a word for it from God, from whom he ought to have expected and waited for a peculiar command, as to the thing, and time, and place. Thoſe that run on ſuch Errands as God never ſent them on, and preſume to do ſuch works as God never ſet them about, or will venture to do his work in a way of their own, cannot with any ſhadow of reaſon expect a reward from his hand, let them get one where they can: Why ſhould God pay them for doing that which is none of his work, or for doing it after their own faſhion? *Nadab* and *Abihu* did the work of God in offering Incenſe, but they did it after their own faſhion, in making uſe of ſtrange fire, and it coſt them their lives; they found God not a bountiful Rewarder, but a dreadful Revenger. When Promiſes are made by God to any thing, they do plainly ſpeak that thing, to which thoſe Promiſes are made, a duty. Now we find here in the Text a great and gracious promiſe made by our *Lord Jeſus* to ſecret Prayer: *Do this*, ſaith he, *when thou prayeſt, enter into thy chamber, and ſhut thy door about thee*; ſtudy all poſſible privacy and retirement; let no body know of that which thou

thou goeſt about, if thou canſt help it: do it ἐν κρυπτῷ, *in ſecret*; there is *Chriſt*'s Counſel, and it muſt needs be good, becauſe given by him, in whom are all the treaſures of wiſdom and knowledge, and whoſe name is *Wonderful*, *Counſellour*: now take with you the Promiſe annexed to this Counſel. *Thy Father, which ſeeth in ſecret, ſhall reward thee openly.* God will not ſend one ſingle Petitioner empty from his Throne of Grace: though thou goeſt begging, yet thou ſhalt return rejoycing. *Abraham*, the Father of the Faithful, had bowels of compaſſion yearning over his wicked Neighbours; he prayed in ſecret for filthy *Sodom*. There was no body to back him in that Suit, nor to plead together with him: that City was indeed ſo bad, that he was both aſhamed and afraid to appear as an Advocate for them, and therefore he did more than once deprecate the Divine diſpleaſure; *Oh let not the Lord be angry*: yet obſerve how mighty he was with God. He lifted up prayer after prayer, and God condeſcended to him again and again. Single and ſolitary *Abraham* had ſuch a great intereſt and ſucceſs, that the glorious and provoked God did not give over granting, until *Abraham* had given over praying.

By

By what hath been said, I hope the first thing promised is performed; namely, it is made plain and evident, That Secret-prayer is the Christian's duty. We now proceed to the Second, which is to prove, That if it be rightly managed, it will be his advantage; and to that end, I shall only shew, that it will afford him these two things:

1. *Safety.*
2. *Comfort.*

1. *First*, Secret Prayer is a choice and excellent means of *Security*; would a Man be safe when he is alone, then let him pray when he is alone? On this side of Heaven there is not any one place to be found, in which a person may rationally look upon himself as quite out of the reach of danger. I heard one once wittily say, *He did not upon the Road fear Highway-men, so long as he was alone.* But there are other enemies from whom we may apprehend mischief when we are most alone. The subtil Serpent wrigled himself into Paradise it self; and there he did mortally sting our first Parents, and undid them and all their posterity in them. Holy *Paul* was perfectly safe while he continued in the third Heaven, the

the malicious Tempter could not come at him there; ſince he was caſt down from that bleſſed place, He never yet could, and for the future he never ſhall make a re-entry; nor is his Arm ſtrong enough to ſhoot an Arrow, or throw a fiery Dart ſo high: But no ſooner was that eminent Apoſtle come down again, but he was deſperately ſet upon, worſe than the *Philiſtins* were upon him; there was a Thorn ſtuck in his fleſh, which could not but put him to pain; and a *Meſſenger of Satan* was ſent to buffet him, who without peradventure gave him no ſmall blows.

One would conclude a perſon ſafe enough when no-body is with him; as there is none to *help*, ſo there is none to *hurt*; yet even-then he may be in danger; for though there be no Man with him, yet there is a Devil with him; yea, more than one, poſſibly more than a Legion. It might have been rationally concluded, That *David* walking upon the top of his Houſe, did not ſtand in need of his Life-guard about him; Who was that ſhould or could do the King a miſchief there? Yet even there a Naked Woman conquered that Man of War, and a malicious Devil let fly one of his envenom'd Arrows, and wounded him to the very heart by the eye. It had been well

for

for that good Man, if, instead of gazing about, and viewing every object that presented, he had been looking up to his God, and praying in secret.

Know and consider, O thou poor Soul, the Devil hath a mind to thee, not out of any Love he bears thee, for there is no such thing in Devils; they must cease to be Devils before they can have any kindness for Men: But he hath a mind to you, as a roaring Lion hath to his prey; and in pursuance of his bloody design, he is restless; though he can do himself no good, he reckons it worth his while to do thee a mischief; and therefore he doth not only walk with thee up and down in the Street, and from this private or publick House to that; nor only follow thee to the publick Congregation, there to divert thy thoughts, or deaden thy affections, or direct thine eye to some vain and wanton object, or pick up the seed which is sown, that though it be cast in at the ear, yet it may never reach so far as the heart to root there, and bring forth precious fruit in the Life and Conversation; but he will also dog you into your Chambers, and intrude into your Closets; when the Door is shut, he will get in; you cannot, while here, get clear of the *old Man*, and the *old Serpent*; and where-ever he is,

you

you may be ſure, He comes for no good. He is wholly ſet upon miſchief; that is his conſtant imploy, his beloved work, his heart is ſet upon it, he follows it cloſe, and with all his might.

Therefore my advice is, That thou wouldeſt make Prayer thy Cloſet-buſineſs; that when this implacable Enemy of thine finds thee alone, he may not have an advantage againſt thee. When in *Epheſ. 6.* the Apoſtle *Paul* had told you of the Enemies you muſt contend with, that they are not only *fleſh and blood*, but alſo *principalities and powers, and ſpiritual wickedneſſes in high places*; he adviſed you to put on *the whole Armour of God*, and over and above he directed you to this excellent and neceſſary work *of Prayer*, as knowing that both your ſecurity and victory depend as much upon that, as any thing: Your *Armour* will not do without your *God*; and him you cannot expect without *Prayer*. If then you would not fall both *into* temptation, and *by* it, your care and work muſt be to watch and pray; and I do not in the leaſt doubt but Prayer hath laid many a *reſtraint* upon the Devil, and kept him off from medling with a Child of God when his fingers have itch'd at him, and *blunted* his tools often and often, ſo that he could not do the work he intended with them;

and

and *broken* the neck of many a curſed deſign which he was moſt induſtriouſly carrying on.

2. *Secondly*, Secret Prayer is a ſpecial way for the making of your retirement *comfortable and pleaſant to you.* Solitarineſs is looked upon as having Melancholly for its uſual Companion; and a Life of lonelineſs and retirement is reckon'd a very diſconſolate Life. The Prophet made this a part of his bitter complaint, *Pſal.* 102. 7. *I hat he was as a ſparrow alone upon the houſe top.* And *Solomon* ſaith, Eccleſ. 4. 10. *Wo be to him that is alone.* Hence one ſaid, *He that loves to be alone, is either a Beaſt, or a God.* But Secret-Prayer is an excellent way to ſweeten ſolitarineſs, and take off the uncomfortableneſs of it. If thou doſt but in thine uprightneſs apply thy ſelf heartily to this work, when thou art without any Company, thou ſhalt not be without matter of rejoycing; but with *Hagar* in the Wilderneſs, find a *Spring opened to thee.* That was a great ſaying of one, *Nunquam minus ſolus quam cum maxime ſolus:* I am never leſs alone, than when I am moſt alone. He did never find leſs want of Company, than when he had none; then a Man enjoys his God and himſelf; and he that hath indeed that enjoyment, needs nobody. *John* 16. 32. Our Saviour ſpake thus

to

to his Diſciples, *The hour cometh, yea, is now come, that ye ſhall be ſcattered, every man to his own, and ſhall leave me alone, and yet I am not alone, becauſe the father is with me.* Not alone when alone. I ſhall be altogether without you, but not without my Father; who doth more, infinitely more than fill up thoſe vacancies; as at noon-day we do not want the Stars, though they be all obſcur'd and diſappear, becauſe we have the glorious Light and Beams of the Sun, who doth abundantly ſupply their abſence.

David tells us in *Pſalm* 145. 18. which is a *Pſalm* of Praiſe, That *the Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him, to all that call upon him in truth.* Sincere Prayer will fetch God down from Heaven, to ſtand at thy right hand. Our Heavenly Father is more ready than the moſt affectionate tender-hearted Mother upon Earth, to ariſe and come in at the cry of the Child. In *Pſalm* 18. we find that good Man in his diſtreſs, *called upon the Lord, and cried unto his God*, and God heard him: Divine Love is quick of hearing, *He heard my voice out of his holy temple, and my cry came before him, even into his ears.* And now obſerve what haſte God made to his Servant; *Verſ.* 9, 10. *He bowed the Heavens and came down: He rode upon a Cherub and did fly; yea, he did fly upon the wings of*

the

the wind. When Holy *David* wanted his God, *God* would be with him presently.

I dare assure thee, O Saint, if thou wilt but get thy Soul upon the Wing, and by the hand of fervent believing Prayer knock at Heavens door, thou shalt to thy comfort find, that thy beloved will not be long from thee; no, no, he will be sure graciously to return thy Visit, he will come and drop some sweet smelling Myrrh upon the handles of thy lock; Secret Prayer is the nearest and readiest way to secret and intimate Communion with God; as it is an opening of the heart to God, so it makes way for God's opening of his heart to the Saint; and when that is opened, what blessed discoveries are made, what treasures appear, and riches of Grace, what counsels of Wisdom, and thoughts of good and great designs, the very sight of which is ravishing, and may well put the Soul into a transport! When guilty, but convinced, *Ephraim* got alone, and made his reflections, and thereupon bemoan'd himself for his former folly, stubbornness and obstinacy, and begged hard for converting, turning Grace, *God* presently turned toward him, and with yearning Bowels spake his love; this resolution was immediately taken up, *I will surely have mercy upon him.* In a word, God doth some-

ſometimes in diſpleaſure withdraw from his ſinning Children, but it is with a reſolution to be found of them when they ſeek him; and to return to them when he is ſent for. *Hoſ.* 5. 15. *I will go and return to my place, till they acknowledg their offence, and ſeek my face.* I will ſtay away, I will not come near them, I will have nothing to do with them *till* they do this; but let them do it as ſoon as they will, and they ſhall meet with acceptance; I will riſe out of my place, and viſit them with Salvation. He will be ſure to come at Prayers call, if ſome crying ſin or other do not drown the voice of it; and his Preſence and Beams will effectually ſcatter the thickeſt and blackeſt Clouds; the light of his countenance, when once lifted up, will make it a day of gladneſs to the moſt benighted Soul: Whencever he comes, he will be ſure to bring a bleſſing along with him, and ſo appear unto its joy. Theſe particulars, to which I have largely ſpoken, are, I hope, ſufficient to prove, that Secret Prayer is both your Duty and your Intereſt; and ſo I have done with the Doctrinal part, and ſhall now proceed to the improvement of it by Application, which will be twofold:

1. For

1. For Reprehension.
2. For Exhortation.

The use of Reprehension or Reproof shall be directed to three sorts of persons, who do indeed deserve to fall *under* it; and oh that it may come with such power as to make them fall *before* it, and issue in their amendment of those things, which by the light of Truth breaking in upon them, they shall see to be amiss.

First, They are sharply to be reproved, for they are deeply guilty before God, who instead of making Conscience, and living in the performance of *Secret Prayer*, are altogether strangers to, and live in the total neglect of all *Prayer*: They do not know what it is to approach unto the Throne of God, and to pour out their Souls before him; they *go to their Beds* at night, like Swine to their Sty, not begging Divine protection; and *rise out of them* in a morning, and go about their business without paying any acknowledgments to their great Benefactor, under the Wing of whose careful Providence they were secured; yea, sit down to their Tables, without asking God's Blessing, as if they had no dependence upon him; and when they have eaten

and

and are full, rise up to work or play, without giving God Thanks, as if they were not at all beholden to him. And thus they live Prayerless lives in the World: They have passed *many* days, and escaped *many* dangers, and received *many* mercies, and committed *many* sins, but never set themselves, at least, in good earnest, to put up *one* Prayer. Oh how do they tumble out by wholesale an innumerable company of execrable Oaths, and tremendous Curses, which speaks their Tongues the Devils Instruments, set on fire with the fire of Hell; but no body ever saw them upon their knees before God, nor heard a word of Prayer drop from their Lips. They have had many Dangers prevented; but never sought refuge, nor took shelter in God. They have every day received multitudes of Mercies; but did never solemnly beg one. God did in the time of the *Old Testament*, order that the Fire of the Altar should never go out, and appointed the morning and evening sacrifice; but poor creatures, these have no fire, their hearts are as cold as Ice, they know not what true love to God means, and having no fire in themselves, God shall have no sacrifice from them, his Altars shall be empty, they have nothing to lay on from the beginning of the year to the

end

end of it. How many are there that never made an attempt this way, never tried to Pray, never went about the work? *They in the pride of their countenances will not seek after God. He is not in all their thoughts*, Ps. 10. 4. In all of them! He is but in few of them; and when he is in any, when he forcibly breaks in upon them, and makes his own way, (for they never invite him, nor study to think of him) he is not welcome nor grateful to them. I fear, if a man should come and ask some of you such a question as this; Friend, Neighbour, what intercourses are there between God and you? what converse and fellowship have you with God? do you pray a-days? do you pray by your selves in your Chambers, or with your Families? are you some of that blessed wrestling Generation who seek the face of the *God of Jacob*? if you would speak the truth, and not cover your sin and shame with a lie, you must answer, No, not I: God knows, I cannot pray, I do not know how to pray, I never went about it, I see no need of it, I have no heart to it: may we not say of these, what *Agur* said of himself, *Prov.* 30. 2. *Surely they are more brutish than any man, they have not the understanding of a man, they have not learned wisdom, nor have they any knowledge of the Holy.* Let them be reckoned for

Beasts

Beasts in humane shape. Some have written as if they did not look upon Reason but Religion, as the thing which makes the specifical difference between a Man and a Brute; because there is something in Brutes which, say they, may pass for Reason, to be sure it looks very like it, but there is nothing like Religion in them; and I would fain know, what there is, or at present can be of Religion in that Man or Woman, who lives without Prayer; and how unworthy is such an one of the name, *Man?* The late Learned *Bishop Wilkins*, in his treatise concerning the Principles and Duties of Natural Religion, hath these passages: 'In the 'Actions of many brute creatures, there are 'discernable some footsteps, some imperfect 'tinctures and degrees of Ratiocination, such 'a natural sagacity as at least bears a near re-'semblance to Reason. From whence it 'may follow, that it is not Reason in the 'general, which is the form of humane 'nature; but Reason as it is determined to 'actions of Religion, of which we do not 'find the least signs or degrees in Brutes. 'Man being the only creature in this visible 'World, that is formed with a capacity of 'worshipping and enjoying his Maker. And 'he adds, This is not any new Opinion, but 'what several of the Ancient Writers,

'Phi-

Philosophers, Orators, and Poets have attested to, who make the notion of a Deity and Adoration of him, to be the true difference betwixt *Man* and *Beast*. Then then who hast hitherto lived without God and Prayer in the World, ruin thy degeneracy, take unto thyself both the name and shame of a Brute, and now begin to act the part of a Man, in falling upon thy knees before God, and with an humble blush, crying out as good *Asaph* did, when once got from under the power and fury of an hideous temptation, *Psalm* 73. 22. *So foolish was I, and ignorant, I was as a beast before thee.*

Besides this, I would have you to consider the disingenuity you discover in living at such a rate, and in such a neglect and contempt of God as this; what, will you not so much as thank God for all that good he doth you? will you own him in none of the footsteps of his Providence, and evidences of his care? doth he step in between you and your dangers, hold your Souls in life, lade you with benefits, direct your affairs, assist you in business, succeed your endeavours, doth he day unto day shew his bounty, and night unto night his goodness, and is it not worth the owning? Will thou not make any thankful acknowledgment,

ment, nor pay him any tribute of praise: wouldst thou carry thus to thy Fellow-creature? or wouldst thou thy self bear it from another?

Think again how unnatural you are to your own Souls: if a poor Creature wants bread, how will he go out into the Fields and Streets, and ask of every one he thinks able to give, and continue upon his knees hours together? dost thou not see them? While thou dost, thou hast reason to reflect upon thy self with indignation and abhorrency: will he beg for a penny? and wilt not thou pray for a Kingdom and a Crown of Glory far better than those of Gold? When a Criminal hath a Sentence of death past upon him, he will plead hard for his life, and leave no stone unturn'd. *Benhadad*, though a great King, when in danger, sent his Servants in a most submissive manner, with Ropes about their Necks, to beg for his life: Thou art a Criminal, the Sentence is past upon thee, and none can tell how soon execution may be done; thou canst not promise thy self an hours respite: how unnatural then art thou, how hard is thy heart, and how cruel to thy self, who goest day after day, and year after year, without sending up a Petition for the life of thy Soul, though thou hast often heard that the King

of Heaven is a merciful King, and that there are forgivenesses with him?

What shall I say? if you are resolved to go on at this rate, and persevere in this inhuman neglect, thou mayst e'ven as well renounce thy Allegiance to God, disown thy being any of his Creatures, deny any dependence which thou hast upon him. Call not thy self from henceforth a Man, a Woman, indued with reason, or acting according to the principles and dictates thereof, but acknowledge thy being sunk down and degenerated into a Beast; and truly thou deservest to be sent with *Nebuchadnezzar* to graze among them, till thou art made better to understand both God and thy self. What, O Man, O Woman, what dost thou mean? live, and not pray? live merely upon God's mercy and patience, and not pray? live upon his goodness, and his cost, and not pray? must thou one day dye, and go into the other World, and not send any prayers thither before thee? Must thou go to God, in order to thy being judged by him, and sentenced as to thy everlasting state, and yet not pray? Surely thou hast lost thy reason, and art chargeable with egregious folly and madness. Oh that I could do something in order to thy cure, and bringing thee to thy self, and upon thy knees, and that God

would by his Spirit and Power accompany what I shall to that purpose offer to thy most serious and repeated consideration.

First, That man who spends his days altogether without Prayer, is dead while he lives: though he hath a natural life, yet he hath nothing of the life of Grace, nothing of that divine life of which the Lord Jesus was the Purchaser, and is the Principle, but is to this very day alienated from the life of God thorough the ignorance and perverseness which is in him, and dead in trespasses and sins. New-born Children cry: What! can a person be born spiritually, born of God, and brought forth unto God, and yet not cry, not pray! It is a thing impossible, it cannot be. The work of Prayer, indeed, may be for a while interrupted, sometimes through inward weakness and oppression, as that holy man complained in *Psalm* 77. 4. *I am so troubled, that I cannot speak*: sometimes through violence offer'd him by temptation; the Enemy of God and Man comes and stops his mouth: otherwise the very nature which a Saint hath been made a partaker of, doth carry him out hereunto: and that holy fire which is kindled in his Soul, will be ascending up in such a flame; 2 *Cor.* 4. 13. It is written, *I believed, therefore have I spoken: we also be-*

lieve, and therefore ſpeak: that is to be underſtood of ſpeaking in a way of *confeſſion*; but it is true alſo, ſpeaking in a way of *ſupplication.* In *Acts* 9. 11. *The Lord ſaid unto* Ananias, *Ariſe, go into the ſtreet, which is called* Straight, *and enquire in the Houſe of* Judas *for one* Saul *of* Tarſus, *for behold, he prayeth.* Poor *Ananias* was ſtartled at the Order, and not very willing to be ſent upon ſuch an Errand, and began to object; Lord, this man hath got a very bad name, I have heard of him by many. He is the talk both of Town and Countrey, as having been a miſchievous Inſtrument; he hath done much evil to thy Saints at *Jeruſalem*, and now he comes armed with Authority from the Chief Prieſts to bind all that call on thy Name. Well, *Ananias*, do what thou art bidden; for though it is true, that he hath been a vile Wretch, a cruel and malicious Enemy, fear him not, the Wolf is turned into a Lamb; It is no matter what formerly he was, he is now quite another thing, and is acted by a far better Spirit. He is a new man, and thou mayſt take this for a certain and undoubted evidence of it. He is a Praying-man. He that before ſpake nothing but blaſphemies and outrages againſt Chriſt, and breathed out threatnings and ſlaughter againſt the Diſciples of the Lord, did now that he

was

was converted and ſanctified, ſpeak ſupplications.

It is the faſhion of a great many, when the Lord's day comes, they will go out to hear, and they are for variety, this man and that, and twenty more, poſſibly three Sermons upon a day, peradventure four: and I do not blame any for being ſwift to hear, it is an excellent thing to ſee Chriſtians hungry, and of good appetites, ſo that they do but allow themſelves neceſſary time for concoction, and be not wanting to perſonal and Family duties; but Conſcience, do thou ſpeak, and that loud enough to make guilty Perſons hear and feel too: be there not ſome of theſe, who at home are never upon their knees before God? If a man could look into their Houſes, and into their Chambers, he would find that Prayer is quite ſhut out from thence. And for my part, I cannot but tell you, That let theſe Perſons hold their heads never ſo high, and have obtained never ſo great a name, I can look upon them as being no better than a company of walking Ghoſts, ſuch as do really want an inward vital principle, and are carried up and down from one Congregation to another by ſome external conſideration. Prayer is a breathing in Heaven's Air, it is the breathing of the Soul in the boſome of God;

it draws in spirit and life from him, and then again it pours out and empties it self into him: and it is full out as possible for a man to live a natural life without natural breathing, as it is for him to live a spiritual life without spiritual breathing, I mean, without Prayer. You know when God promiseth his Spirit, *Zechar.* 12. 10. he doth it in these Expressions: *I will pour out upon the House of* David, *and the Inhabitants of* Jerusalem, *the Spirit of grace and supplications.* Wheresoever the Spirit of God comes and dwells in the Soul as a Spirit of Grace, there he doth certainly act as a Spirit of Supplications: and the Apostle *Paul* saith, *Rom.* 8. 15. *That the Sons of God receive the Spirit of Adoption, whereby they cry Abba, Father.* Which imports a filial boldness and confidence in dealing with him by fervent Prayer.

I remember what you may meet in 1 *Cor.* 13. 1, &c. *Though I speak with the tongues of men and Angels, though I have the gift of Prophecy, and understand all Mysteries, and all knowledge; though I have all faith, so as to remove mountains; though I bestow all my goods on the poor, and give my body to be burned, yet if I have not Charity, it profits me nothing. I am nothing, but as a meer sounding brass and tinkling cymbal.* What he there speaks of Charity,

Charity, or Love, which doth indeed make Actions lovely in the sight of God and men, and puts a lustre and beauty upon them; the very same may be affirmed concerning Prayer. Let a man be never so well accomplished, never so raised in his attainments, never so fluent and warm in his discourses, never so eminent for his profession, never so frequent and attentive in his hearing, never so abundant in acts of Charity, yet if he be a prayerless Person, he is nothing; nothing in Religion, nothing to purpose; all his parts and performances, though many and specious, will amount to nothing; in Heaven's Arithmetick they will be of no more significancy, than so many Cyphers without a Figure, to put a value into them.

That which I have said, amounts to thus much; To live without Prayer, is utterly inconsistent with a gracious and holy frame; and all that such an one doth, will never turn him to a good account. You may as soon live a spiritual life without Faith, as live by Faith without Prayer: for, as was before observed, they that believe, will speak. When God hath kindled a spark of Grace in the Soul, it will be working in a way of Prayer; that spark will fly upward, and carry the Soul along with it. Thus we find it in

Psal. 39. 3. *My heart was hot within me; while I mused, the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue.* What did he speak? Prayers. *Lord, make me to know my end, and the measure of my days.* Therefore my advice is, that you would either take up Prayer, and follow it as a principal part of a Christians work, or else lay down your Profession; boast not of a filial Relation to God, while thou art not possessed with a filial spirit and disposition. Never talk of your being acquainted with God, and some of his Friends, when in all your lives you never spake one serious hearty word to him. If you are resolved to live without Prayer, be so just and reasonable as to put off the honourable name *Christian*, which doth by no means belong to you, and call your selves Heathens, Beasts, nay, which is worse, though not too bad for you, down-right practical Atheists.

Secondly, Your Condition at the present is very miserable, though you know it not: so long as you live without Prayer, you live without a blessing: whatsoever may light upon you, the blessing of God is the portion of a praying People. If you will look into the Book of God (which, I believe, you seldom do; for those that will not beg his mercy, will not labour to know his will) you may see how much it cost *Esau* to get a blessing

blessing from his Father *Isaac*, he shed many tears, and lifted up loud cries; *Gen.* 27. 33,34. *Isaac* told him, that one had brought him Venison, which he had eaten of, and he blessed him, and he should be blessed. It is said, *When* Esau *heard the words of his Father, he cried with a great and exceeding bitter cry, and said unto his Father, Bless me, even me also, O my Father:* and when *Isaac* answered, *vers.* 37. *Behold, I have made him thy Lord, and all his Brethren have I given to him for Servants, and with corn and wine have I sustained him: and what shall I do now unto thee, my Son!* Vers. 38. Esau *said unto his Father, Hast thou but one blessing, my Father? Bless me, even me also, O my Father;* and Esau *lifted up his voice, and wept.* What, art thou so poor, O my Father, as that in giving one blessing, thou hast given away all? Hast thou not reserved one? And all this he was fain to do, before he could obtain. Yea, and it was not only thus with a profane *Esau*, who might well be thought to have forfeited the blessing by his selling his Birthright; but even good *Jacob* himself, when he would have a blessing from Heaven, he was constrained to wrestle with the Angel for it, and to put forth all his strength in the conflict, and to keep his hold, though the Angel seemed willing to shake him off; yea,

and to tell him at last, that he would not let him go until he had got it. Thus it hath been formerly: Blessings come down from Heaven upon the wings of Prayer.

And what, O man, dost thou think, that the Blessings of God are fallen so much in their price, and grown so cheap at this day, as that they go a begging? Or that men may have them without asking for? God hath been wont to stand more upon his Honour than so: and therefore hath declared his will, that Prayer shall come in between the Promise and the Performance; he would have his People sue out the Promise before they shall have the good which is contained in it; as is evident from that well-known Scripture, *Ezek.* 36. we find the heart of God greatly inlarged to his People, and Promises flowed in abundance from him, and He gives them the assurance of his fixed resolution in the thing. *I the Lord have spoken it, and I will do it.* Do not you doubt, call not my truth in question, I will be as good as my word. Yet observe what follows in the 37th *verse*; *Thus saith the Lord God, I will yet be enquired of by the House of* Israel *to do it for them.* All those great and good things had been in the heart and purpose of God from eternity, and now he was graciously pleased for their

comfort

comfort to put them into his Promise; but if they had a desire to have them, they must send Prayer to Heaven for them.

Holy *David* tells us, *Psal.* 3. 8. *God's blessing is upon his People:* and certainly every one will grant that there is a great deal of reason why it should be upon them *exclusive* to all the World beside; upon them, and upon none but upon them: they only have been by the *Lord Jesus* redeemed from the curse of the Law, and therefore they only can lay a rightful claim to the Blessings of the Gospel. God may, yea, and he every day doth give bread to his Enemies; but surely as long as they continue his Enemies, he will not give them his blessing; and indeed why should they expect it? But now, O prayerless Soul, how wilt thou prove thy self one of his People? Thou hast upon thee those Spots which are not the Spots of his People, when at the same time thou dost want those Marks which are the Marks of his People: thou who spendest thy days without prayer, dost pay no homage unto God, thou owneſt no dependence upon him, thou giveſt him no reverence, thou dost him no service, thou bringeſt him no honour; and I pray, tell me, why should his blessing be upon thee? God may deal bountifully with thee, possibly he doth do

so,

ſo already, and gives thee waters of a full cup; it is his manner; many ſcraps and good bits fall under his Table; He lets them fall on purpoſe for his Dogs to gather up: his Sun ſhines, and his Rain falls upon barren Wilderneſſes and noyſome Dunghills, as well as upon fruitful Fields, and pleaſant Gardens; Outward mercies are therefore called Common Mercies, becauſe all have their ſhare in them, the juſt and the unjuſt too, the evil as well as the good; ſo that the Wiſe Man tells us, *No man can know either love or hatred by all that is before him.* Therefore let no man be proud of his temporal Enjoyments, nor of an elated Spirit, becauſe he is of a raiſed condition, and ſtands upon the World's upper ground. If thou haſt no other arguments to uſe, but thoſe thou fetcheſt from the World's Topicks, thou wilt never prove thy ſelf Heaven-born, nor make out thy Title to the happineſs and glory which is above. God indeed may fill thy Pocket, and ſpread thy Table, furniſhing it with variety of Dainties; He may cram thy Bags, and make thy Cup run over; He may throw into thy Poſſeſſion Houſes and Lands, as he gave *Quales* to the *Iſraelites*, in his wrath; and if thou wilt take the pains to turn over all thou haſt, and make as diligent ſearch as thou canſt, thou wilt

wilt not find one blessing in it; many a Creature, and in every one a curse: thy Cloaths have a plague in them, witness thy Pride; thy Table is thy snare, witness thy excess; and Riches are laid up by thee to thy hurt, whilst thou makest them thy God, which should be no more than thy Servants. Thus it is with thee at present, and thy present condition is thy best condition: unless thou growest better, that will not: all that thou canst do, is to rejoyce in sense, thou must leave it to others to rejoice in hope. But however, if it will do thee any good, and the Lord grant that it may, we will enquire what is like to be hereafter. Therefore,

Lastly, Let us look on to the consequence, and consider what will follow this sinful bruitish negect of your unquestionable duty. You know, your own Consciences tell you, that you do not pray; you are not convinced of any need that you have of it: other things there are which you think you cannot be without, such are your Jovial Companions, and your vain antick Dresses, but you can be, and do very well without Prayer; you taste no sweetness in it: ranting and roaring is musick, Healths and Huzza's, Balls and Masques, are ravishingly delicious; but to you, Prayer is a very dull and insipid business

ends. But, I pray, what will be at the last? I would fain have my best at last, and so would you too, if you be wise: if you have not your best at your latter end, you will be found fools at your latter end. I find an excellent wish concerning *Israel* of old, whether it was God's wish, or *Moses*'s, or both, I am sure it was very good, and carried in it a great deal of love; *Deut.* 32. 29. *O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end.* By latter end there, according to the judgment of Expositors, we are not so much to understand their death, as the end and issue of that course which they were then steering. O that they would seriously think with themselves, and wisely foresee whither that way would bring them, in which they were then walking. It was a very smooth and pleasant way, it was paved with delights, but the great business was, whither did it lead them? It is my hearty wish for you, whoever you are, that you would once in a day retire yourselves, and get alone, and seriously think what your total neglect of Prayer will produce, when you are on a Death-bed, and after Death, in Eternity.

Fifth, What fruit you will have from hence, when *sickness* Arrests you, and you find that the *King of terrors* is at your very door; that will be a dismal time, and it will cause many thoughts and tremblings of heart; and then, if ever, you will stand in need of *Cordials*, and happy the Man that hath his comfortable Reflections and Prospects to support his Spirits; who can look *back* to his Life past with *peace*, and look *forward* to Eternity with *hope*. When a Child of God, that hath maintain'd a close and intimate Communion with his God, and given himself unto Prayer, comes to lie upon his Death-bed, he is so roughly handled by that last enemy, that he cannot pray; his heart is so faint within him, and his pains are so strong upon him, that he hath not any leisure for that work in which he hath found so much sweetness, and for which he hath so dear a love: Alas then his case! his weakness, his agonies, his tumblings and tossings are such, that he cannot pray as he was wont, only sigh and groan, and lift up an eye, and give a look toward God's Holy Temple, and dart up a short ejaculation: Poor Soul! that is the utmost length he can go, and it is no small grief to him that he is so straitned and confined. Holy *Asaph* put this among the Rea-

sons

sons of his bitter complaints, *Psal.* 77. 4. That *he was so troubled, that he could not speak.* But at that very time he can relieve and comfort himself with his former praying, and former walking and Communion with God; his former seeking of God, and conversing with him. When there was a message of death, by the Prophet, brought to *Hezekiah*, he could send this short Petition up again to Heaven, *Isa.* 38. 3. *Remember, now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth, and with a perfect heart, and have done that which is good in thy sight.* He could do but very little then, his strength was gone, and his breath was short; but he could with comfort remember, and desire God himself to remember how he *had* walked, and what he had done in his Halcion and healthful days. So when a gracious person is disabled for his work, he can think thus, There is a stock of Prayers which I have laid up in Heaven, against such a time of need as this is; and the thought thereof will be a singular support and comfort to him.

But what do *you think will become of you* at such a time, you that have been all your days strangers to this work? When you come to dye, you *cannot* pray, your distempers and pains will not let you, and you

do

do not know how to go about it, nor how to do one ſtroke at it; and it will then be a ſting and horrour to you to think, that when you were in health and ſtrength, and all things well with you, you *would not* pray. You were called upon often, by your godly Miniſters, and by your gracious Friends and Relations, but you would not. At a dying hour you will have *no fitneſs* for that work; and all the time that you lived before, you had *no heart* to it. But poſſibly you will comfort your ſelves with this, that when you are ſick, and full of fears and inward diſquiets, and you are not in a capacity of praying for your ſelves, then you, or ſome of your Friends for you, will ſend for ſome godly Miniſter or other, and deſire him to pray for you. Well, ſuppoſe that is done, and the Miniſter ſent for, comes, if he knows what a wretch thou haſt been, and how much thou haſt neglected God and thy Duty all thy days, What ſtraitnings of Soul muſt he of neceſſity be under as to thee? With what holy confidence and hope may we go to God in Prayer on the behalf of a godly perſon when ſick, if we can ſay to God as they did to Chriſt on the behalf of *Lazarus*, John 11. 3. *Lord, he whom thou loveſt, is ſick*? But what a damp muſt it needs be to us, when we think we are going to God

God for a sick and dying Man, but such an one as neglected God, and hated him, and lived without him, and in open rebellion against him? I fear, I fear, there are too many among us that befool and deceive themselves with this, That if they can get a Minister to Pray by them (especially if it be such an one as will give them the *Sacrament* too) oh, then all is well, and their Souls go immediately to Heaven without any stop by the way, and the Gate of Glory is opened to them, and entrance granted; but it is probable that will not do, and that these Men build their high hopes upon a Sandy-foundation that will fail them: And I would fain know what great encouragement, or what sufficient ground we have to believe, that we shall carry them in the Arms of our Prayers safe to Heaven, who would not themselves take one right step in the way that leads thither; would never be humble Petitioners for the pardon of their Sins, or for the Life and Salvation of their own Souls? That I look upon as exceeding worthy of your observation and repeated thoughts, which we meet with in the 1st of *Samuel*, *chap.* 12. After that good Man had faithfully reproved the people for their great wickedness in asking a King, and likewise put them into a great consternation

by

by a Storm of Thunder and Rain in the time of Wheat-Harvest, which was unusual in that Country; they became humble Suitors to him, saying in *verse* 19. *Pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God, that we die not.* That request he was most freely willing to grant; *God forbid*, saith he, *that I should sin in ceasing to pray for you.* He had prayed for them, and would continue to pray for them. But now mark and remember that which followeth in *verse* 24. *Only fear the Lord, and serve him in truth with all your heart.* Which is, as if he had said, I will not be wanting to my Duty, you are a people that I dearly love, and heartily wish welfare and prosperity to; I will speak for you, and plead for you, and wrestle with God for you; but do not you lay too great stress upon my Prayers; look to it that you be not found sinning against God, whilst I am praying to him for you, lest you do your selves more mischief than I can do you good. My Prayers will not prevail on your behalf, unless you will resolve to fear God your selves, and to seek and serve him your selves, and pray, and honour and obey him your selves. By warrant of that Scripture, I do now say to you, when you are sick and in distress, and fear you shall dye, you will call the Ministers to

pray

pray for you, and we are ready to do it; when you send for us we will come (only I wish that we may be sent for sooner than we are by some of you, *viz.* while you are able to give us an account of your selves, and in a capacity of receiving counsel and advice) and when we come, it shall be with bowels of pity and compassion, and we will pray for you heartily, and with all our might; but do not you trust to that, and pass the time of your health and strength in a supine carelessness and neglect, but now make Prayer your business, go to the Throne of Grace upon your own errand, and seek God your selves.

Secondly, Consider what will be the fruit of this total neglect of Prayer, after Death hath put a period to your sinful careless Life. *Enoch*, while in the way, walked with God; and then in the end *God* took him. The Communion was begun here, that shewed the Holiness of *Enoch*; in Heaven it was perfected, and that made his happiness compleat. A Praying Saint doth at death go up to the Quire of Angels and glorified spirits of just Men, to joyn with them in their loud and never-ending Allelujahs; they lived a Life of Prayer upon Earth, and they shall live a life of Praise in Heaven.

But

But what will become of you that are altogether strangers to the work? what kind of Eternity is that which you shall launch into? How unspeakably doleful will your condition be in the other World? You are not fit for the work of Praises, for your instruments are not in tune for it, there never was any thing done here for the putting your hearts in frame; from you there would proceed nothing but jarring in the midst of that most pleasant and melodious Consort. You cannot pray to God, which is the work of poor indigent Beggars; How then can you exalt and praise him, which, to do, is the work of holy and ever-blessed Angels? And then if you are not fit for Heaven, you will be fit for Hell; if no company for Angels, then for Devils; if you will not *pray* here, you shall in the torment and bitterness of Soul roar and howl there; you will not honour God, he will punish you; you cared not for the knowledg of his ways, and you shall not know his rest; you will not *seek* his face, and you shall not *see* his face: No, no, down you shall be thrust into that lake where there shall be fire to torment, but no light to refresh; where there shall not be the voice of joy and triumphs, but weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. In this Life you send

up

pray for you, and we are ready to do it; when you send for us we will come (only I wish that we may be sent for sooner than we are by some of you, *viz.* while you are able to give us an account of your selves, and in a capacity of receiving counsel and advice) and when we come, it shall be with bowels of pity and compassion, and we will pray for you heartily, and with all our might; but do not you trust to that, and pass the time of your health and strength in a supine carelessness and neglect, but now make Prayer your business, go to the Throne of Grace upon your own errand, and seek God your selves.

Secondly, Consider what will be the fruit of this total neglect of Prayer, after Death hath put a period to your sinful careless Life. *Enoch*, while in the way, walked with God; and then in the end *God* took him. The Communion was begun here, that shewed the Holiness of *Enoch*; in Heaven it was perfected, and that made his happiness compleat. A Praying Saint doth at death go up to the Quire of Angels and glorified spirits of just Men, to joyn with them in their loud and never-ending Allelujahs; they lived a Life of Prayer upon Earth, and they shall live a life of Praise in Heaven.

But

But what will become of you that are altogether strangers to the work? what kind of Eternity is that which you shall launch into? How unspeakably doleful will your condition be in the other World? You are not fit for the work of Praises, for your instruments are not in tune for it, there never was any thing done here for the putting your hearts in frame; from you there would proceed nothing but jarring in the midst of that most pleasant and melodious Consort. You cannot pray to God, which is the work of poor indigent Beggars; How then can you exalt and praise him, which, to do, is the work of holy and ever-blessed Angels? And then if you are not fit for Heaven, you will be fit for Hell; if no company for Angels, then for Devils; if you will not *pray* here, you shall in the torment and bitterness of Soul roar and howl there; you will not honour God, he will punish you; you cared not for the knowledg of his ways, and you shall not know his rest; you will not *seek* his face, and you shall not *see* his face: No, no, down you shall be thrust into that lake where there shall be fire to torment, but no light to refresh; where there shall not be the voice of joy and triumphs, but weeping and wailing, and gnashing of teeth. In this Life you send

up

up no Prayers to God, but live as if you did not know him, as if you did not need him, as if you had no love for him; and the truth is, you have not. Well, remember this, He lets you alone at present, and carrieth as if he took no notice, but he will deal with you accordingly, when he hath you in the next World, the place of giving out rewards and punishments, rendering unto every one according as his work hath been; there you shall have tribulation and anguish, but God will not be affected with your miseries, nor will he pity your groans, nor have any respect to your tears. Lay these things to your hearts, and be convinced of this, that Prayer is your interest; set upon the work, if you did but get acquaintance with it, you would love it; if you were but once used to it, you would never leave it. *Psal.* 116. 1, 2. *I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore I will call upon him as long as I live.* And that was long enough; longer he should not pray; so long he would, there is no Praying-work in Heaven: Well, said *David*, I will ply it here, and follow it hard now. He had found the good, and tasted the sweetness of it.

USE.

USE E.

In the second part of this Use of Reprehension, I shall direct my Discourse to those who are altogether for *Publick Praying*, getting into *Churches*, and such (as they call) *Consecrated places*, there *to shine*, (I think that is a word very proper to the design) their Devotion; though I do not see, but that when their hours of Prayer are come, and their Service is doing, their Churches are exceeding empty, which is indeed a shame to them; for if they are perſuaded in their Conſciences, That is the way of God, why do they not frequent it? If they are convinced, That is the work of the Lord, why do they not abound in it? There is a great cry among them for that form and Mode of Worſhip, and I heartily wiſh it may do them much good that love it; but ſince their cry for it is ſo loud, why is their devotion ſo little? Why do ſmall matters keep them at home upon week-days? why do they chuſe Taverns and Ale-houſes, rather than their places of Prayer? Let them look to it, that their *ſeeming zeal* do not come from a bad Principle, and be not directed to a bad end.

I ſhall

up no Prayers to God, but live as if you did not know him, as if you did not need him, as if you had no love for him; and the truth is, you have not. Well, remember this, He lets you alone at present, and carrieth as if he took no notice, but he will deal with you accordingly, when he hath you in the next World, the place of giving out rewards and punishments, rendering unto every one according as his work hath been; there you shall have tribulation and anguish, but God will not be affected with your miseries, nor will he pity your groans, nor have any respect to your tears. Lay these things to your hearts, and be convinced of this, that Prayer is your interest; set upon the work, if you did but get acquaintance with it, you would love it; if you were but once used to it, you would never leave it. *Psal.* 116. 1, 2. *I love the Lord, because he hath heard my voice and my supplications. Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore I will call upon him as long as I live.* And that was long enough; longer he should not pray; so long he would, there is no Praying-work in Heaven: Well, said *David*, I will ply it here, and follow it hard now. He had found the good, and tasted the sweetness of it.

USE.

USE.

In the second part of this Use of Reprehension, I shall direct my Discourse to those who are altogether for *Publick Praying*, getting into *Churches*, and such (as they call) *Consecrated places*, there *to shine*, (I think that is a word very proper to the design) their Devotion; though I do not see, but that when their hours of Prayer are come, and their Service is doing, their Churches are exceeding empty, which is indeed a shame to them; for if they are perswaded in their Consciences, That is the way of God, why do they not frequent it? If they are convinced, That is the work of the Lord, why do they not abound in it? There is a great cry among them for that form and Mode of Worship, and I heartily wish it may do them much good that love it, but since their cry for it is so loud, why is their devotion so little? Why do small matters keep them at home upon week-days? why do they chuse Taverns and Ale-houses, rather than their places of Prayer? Let them look to it, that their *seeming zeal* do not come from a bad Principle, and be not directed to a bad end.

I shall

I shall not speak a word against the *Liturgy*; That is not my business, who desire to follow those things that make for Peace. Let those that like it and chuse it, use it if they please; let them that find it heart-raising, heart-warming, heart-inlarging, go on in their attendance upon it: I envy none that which they like, and may do them good, especially when I have that which pleaseth me better. Blessed be our Gracious God, and thanks to those in Authority over us, we have liberty to serve God according to our Judgments and Consciences; yea, and that Liberty established by a Law. We know there are many Adversaries that are enraged at it; but through Divine Goodness, there is *a wide and effectual door opened*, the Lord grant *none may be able to shut it*.

That which I blame many for, is their *Idolizing* of Publick Places, as if they did put an Holiness and Virtue into work done in them; and as if Publick Prayer were enough, and would serve for all. How have we some superstitious persons, as they pass through an Abbey, Cathedral, *&c.* not only bare their heads, but drop upon their knees in a Pew, or at a Pillar! And others, that I have known, when the Bells chime in, up they get, and to the Church they go,

and

and there they sit till the Service be finished, and that they think sufficient; and with that they do at present put off their Consciences, that is all the Prayer they make, then to Eating, and Drinking, and Visiting, and Gaming, there is no Praying in their Families, none in their Chambers and Closets; I appeal to your Consciences in the Case, and accuse no body living, unless their Consciences accuse them. Now, my Friends, what do you think of this? Is it well? will this do? is this the way to please God? Is this to fill up your days and places with Duty? Is this to deal bountifully with that God, who doth deal so bountifully with you? Is this to fit your selves for the giving up your account unto God? The proud *Pharisee* went to the Temple to pray; but when he had done, he came away with a world of sin in him, and with a load of guilt upon him. He did, indeed, justify and applaud himself; but God's Soul abhorr'd and loath'd him. Whereas the poor, humbled, broken-hearted *Publican* stood a great way, and prayed in the Spirit from an inward and deep sense of his own vileness, and he was sent home to his House justified; God gave him a Pardon and a Smile. I shall not spend much time or pains about this sort of Men,

because I conclude their prejudice is so great, that they will give very little heed to any thing that I shall say, though delivered with all possible meekness, and really designed for their good; yet not knowing what it may please that God to do upon them, who is the Father of *Mercies*, and God of all Grace, and hath the hearts of Men in his hand, and can make what impressions upon them, and changes in them, seem good in his sight, I shall not pass them by altogether in silence; but offer to their consideration these two things, which, in my judgment, carry something of weight in them.

First, Places do not add any value to Actions of Religion, so as to commend them to God. I remember, that which after the discourse of *Cornelius*, *Peter* said unto him, *Acts* 10. 34. *Of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons; but in every nation, he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him.* And I may say, as there is no respect of *Persons* with God, so there is no respect of *Places* with God; He hath no more esteem for the Chancel, than for the body of the Church; and that which is within the Rails, is no more Sacred than that which is without them.

There

There is as near, compendious, and direct a way to the Throne of God from thy House, O Believer, as there is from the Church, or the most magnificent Cathedral; and those Supplications which are made and presented there with an holy heart, by the assistance of the Divine Spirit, and in the name of Christ, shall find as free an access to God, as ready an audience with him, and as gracious an acceptance. It is indeed by us, and all, granted, That the *Temple* at *Jerusalem* was an holy place; yea, there was in it, not only an Holy Place, but the Holy of Holies. God himself had sanctified it, and appropriated it to his own most solemn service; there he had been pleased to place his *Name*, that was an excellent *Type* of the *Lord Jesus*, our ever-blessed Mediator; and where-ever the *Jews* were, into what Countrey soever they were scattered or carried Captive, they were to pray toward it. *Dan.* 6. 10. *When Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house, and his windows being open in his chamber towards Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did afore-time.* But that Temple being destroyed, and not so much as one Stone left upon another, that Churchstate being at an end, and that dispensa-

tion ceased; I know no such thing as Holiness of Places here below. The *Synagogues* among the *Jews* in the Land of *Canaan* were not Holy; but only convenient places for them to meet together in for the performance of publick Worship, and waiting upon God in the way of his Ordinances. And our Churches at this day, come not in the room of the *Temple*, but of those *Synagogues*. There was indeed a very great stir and hot contention in our Saviour's days, and before, about the place of Publick-worship, between the *Jews* and the *Samaritans*: The *Jews* were for the Temple built by *Solomon* at *Jerusalem*, and they were in the right; for that was the place which God had chosen and appointed. On the contrary, the *Samaritans* stood stifly for the Temple, which had been built by their Ancestors upon Mount *Gerizzim*. The Woman of *Samaria*, having an opportunity put into her hands, did in *John* 4. 20. start the Question, and propound it to our Saviour, seeking, as one saith, to be by him satisfied about it, as in a *case of Conscience*. Now it is worth our while to observe his Answer thereunto, which you have in *Verse* 21. *Jesus said unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh when ye shall neither at Jerusalem, nor in this Mountain, worship the Fa-*

ther.

ther. Prayer, Ordinances, and the Worship of God, shall not be restrained to this place nor to that; it shall not be more pleasing, powerful and prevalent in one place, for the place's sake, than it is in another. Add hereunto, that which the Holy Apostle *Paul* saith, in 1 Tim. 2. 8. *I will, that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.* Mark his manner of expression, *I will*; he speaks with Authority, we may be sure he received this from the *Lord.* He would never have said, *I will*, had he not been sure that it was *God's will*; it was God's will, and therefore it was *Paul's* will. But what was it? That Men do not look to the *place* in which they pray, but to the *manner* how they pray; let them pray any where, every where, in what place they themselves judge fit and convenient, so that their hands be washed in innocency, and their hearts are but cleansed from their filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness. Holy and pure Prayer shall be welcome to God, and have a most gracious reception, from what quarter or corner soever it comes. We find that good *Jonah* prayed unto the Lord his God, when he was in the *Belly of the Fish*, which was so dark and dismal a place, that he counted and called it *the belly of Hell*; yet his Prayer

made there, did not lose its way, nor fail of the end for which it was sent. *Jonah* 2. 2. *I cried by reason of mine affliction unto the Lord, and he heard me; out of the belly of hell cried I, and thou heardest my voice.*

Secondly, I do advise and desire you *to examine your selves*, and to be better studied in, and acquainted with your own hearts, than, it may be, as yet you are; for I cannot but tell you, though this be an excellent work, and necessary for all that would manage Religion to everlasting advantage, and approve themselves to God; so it is in a particular manner necessary for them that lay so much stress upon places, and other things of like nature, to watch their hearts narrowly, and to keep a very strict eye upon them, lest by those superstitious observances, they be found wanting to, and of the very vitals of the Duty, and hug and please themselves with a rotten and stinking Carcass, where the Soul and Life are wanting; and as our Lord said to the *Pharisees*, Matt 23. 23. *Wo unto you, Scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites, for ye pay tythe of mint, and anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith:* They neglected the *magnalia legis*, the great things of the Law, while they

they were greatly solicitous about the *minutula*, the little things, which did speak the unsoundness of their hearts; so what shall we think of them who spend all, or the greatest part of their care and heat about those things which come not under any express command of the Divine Law? They that are most curious about their Bodies, are, as it is to be feared, most careless about their Souls; they spend so much time at their Glass, that they have none for the *Bible*; they are so careful that a Pin be not stuck amiss in their Cloaths, that they leave every thing amiss in their Hearts; by the Garbs and unreasonable Dresses, in which some sillily proud persons come into the Assemblies, it is easie for Spectators to determine how they spent and profan'd the Morning of the Sabbath at home; and we may apprehend and fear the same in the present case, that those persons who are so much set for such things as this, are, at least, very apt and prone to bestow none of their care about that which deserves most; they are so much for the place, that they forget and neglect the heart; they are so thoughtful where they pray, that they do not mind how they pray; they are so set for a form, they do not mind, nay, possibly they hate the Power. But by the way, let me whis-

per this in the ear of these persons, That the Altar will not Sanctify a corrupt thing: If you bring dead, formal, lifeless Prayers, though you offer them up in your Consecrated Churches, nay, at your adored Altars, they will not come up with a sweet smelling savour and acceptance before God.

I would not have any body think that I do, God forbid that I should say, A Form of Prayer, and Formality of Heart, are inseparable Companions; I do not doubt but meer formal Professors are most for forms; but I dare not affirm that all those who make use of Forms, are meer formal Professors. I do not doubt but some looking upon Forms as lawful, and out of modesty, and an humble sense of the lowness of their own parts, do make use of Forms when they pray with others, and are conscientious in the use of them; and they do accompany the Petitions, Confessions, and Thanksgivings contained in them, with sincere affections, and do meet with a gracious acceptance with God, and do enjoy a communion with his Holy Majesty.

But

But this I will also be bold to say, and if any be offended at it, upon them be it; That constant stated forms of Prayer, and Formality, are borderers upon one another; they live at no such great distance, but that they frequently, yea commonly, meet together in the same Service, and in the same Persons: And really I am of the mind, that it stands them in hand, who make use of forms, to be very cautious, and look warily to themselves, lest they do, even before they are aware, fall into formality; that indifferency and lukewarmness of Spirit which God cannot endure. When in the forequoted Scripture the Woman of *Samaria* fell into discourse with *Christ* about the place of Worship, whether it ought to be at *Jerusalem*, or in that Mountain, *viz. Gerizim?* our *Saviour* did wisely and graciously take her off from that, as a matter not so momentous as to deserve either her Enquiry, or his Resolution; and fell to acquainting her with, directing her to, and putting her upon the Spirituality of that Worship, which is to be performed, as that which she and every one ought principally to attend unto, because it is that which the heart of God is most for, and upon which his pure eyes are chiefly set. *John* 4. 23, 24. *The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshipers shall worship the Father,*

ther in spirit and truth; for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a spirit; and they that worship him, must worship him in spirit, and in truth. Spiritual Worship is most congruous and agreeable to God. Childish Toys please Children, who have no more wit; outward Pomp and Ceremonies please vain men, who have not so good hearts as they should: but spiritual Worship is acceptable to that God who is himself a Spirit; such Worshippers he seeks, others he rejects when he finds them; therefore you must be such, if you would find favour, or receive a Blessing. And to shut up this particular, I will only add, That if men were once set, as they should be, for the spirituality of Worship, they would not be so unreasonably eager as they are for, nor so tetchy, froward and contentious about Places, Modes, and Forms, which can fetch their pedigree and original no higher than meer human Invention and Appointment. Enough of that; and it will be well if some persons do not think this a little too much.

USE.

In the third and last branch of this Use of Reprehension, my work will be to awaken, rouze, and startle; to convince, and bring

bring those to judge and condemn themselves, who live without secret Prayer: I hear from some, and I do more than partly believe it, That there are many Professors, and those too of some Name and Eminency, who live under the dreadful guilt of this sinful omission: and if there be *some such*, how great may we suppose the total number to be, of them who are this way chargeable! tho' let them be never so many, every one of them, Man, Woman, and Child, is known to that God who observes our down-lying and our up-rising, and is acquainted with all our ways. There are those that will come to publick Ordinances, that they may not be counted Heathens, nor suspected to be Papists, which Party now, blessed be God, is under great infamy and reproach, tho' not greater than they do deserve, upon account of the very Principles of that cursed Religion which they have embraced, and do profess: Yea, and they will attend upon those Ordinances which they think are most purely administred, and also join themselves in Communion with those Churches which they look upon as being of the most Scriptural Constitution, that so they may be reckoned among Christians of the highest Form, and chiefest Rank; yea, and peradventure they will set up Family-duties,

they,

they will call their Children and Servants together, and all under their Roof and Charge, to seek the Lord; lest upon a discontent or remove, some-body within doors should tell-tales, by means whereof their reputation should be blasted, and the truth of their Religion called in question by any of those to whom they are desirous, yea, ambitious of approving themselves. But, wretches as they are! as for Prayer by themselves, either in Chamber or in Closet, or any where else, they do lay it aside altogether. God himself will be a swift Witness against them, that He and they never so met together. They find much other work, and can do many other things when they are alone: They can spend a great deal of time at the Glass, viewing and dressing themselves; they can tell their Money, and read over their Bills and Bonds: but as for Soul-searching Works, and Heart-examining, and seeking after God, either acquainting themselves with him, or making their requests known to him, they are utter strangers to it, and never troubled themselves about any thing of that nature.

Now let me ask you, Is this kind? Is there any thing of ingenuity in it? Can the great God, unto whom you are infinitely obliged, take it well at your hands? You would

would have God look after you in all places where you come: You do not indeed delight in his Company, but would be the Objects of his Care; you would have his Mercy and Goodness follow you all the days of your life. If *Israel* wanted any thing in the Wilderness, if they had not Water here, and Flesh there, they took pet, and fell a grumbling. You expect that God should secure you, and support you, and supply you, when you are alone, as well as in Company; and I would have you give me, if you can, one good reason, why you will not seek and serve Him when alone, as well as in Company?

And I desire you to study the frame of the *Spouse*'s Spirit, and take notice of the resolution she took up, and consider whether there be nothing in it worthy of your learning and imitation. *Cantic.* 8. 1, 2, *O that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother! when I should find thee without, I would kiss thee, yet I should not be despised; I would lead thee, and bring thee into my mother's house.* Bear with me, while I present you with a few thoughts upon these words. In them you have the Spouse's Option and Resolution. Her Option or Wish: *Oh that thou wert as my brother, that sucked the breasts of my mother,* That is, As near in relation and con-

conjunction to me, as near can be: I am for no distance that may issue in strangeness, but the greatest nearness possible, that will warrant familiarity, and justifie a free converse. *Oh that thou wert as my Brother!* mine own Brother, my Brother in all respects, who did not only lie in the same Womb, but was nourished and brought up with the same Milk, and sucked the same Breasts. Well, suppose it had been so; what then? what advantage would she have had? what encouragement would she have taken from thence? That you may see in her *Resolution*, which fixed upon two things: *When I should find thee without, I would kiss thee*; the world should see, that I have an heart, and love for thee. But what, O thou enamour'd Spouse, thou faithful Turtle, what of that? Others will do so too; they will have their lip-kindnesses, who are meer strangers to an hearty and sincere affection. How many men will abound in expressions of love when they are *without*, extraordinary kind to their Wives in the streets, and in their Neighbours houses; huge loving and good-humour'd before folks, when they are meer Dogs, or rather Devils within doors; *Naphtalies* abroad, that give goodly words; but *Nabals* at home, where their Tongues are sharp Swords. Let such men know, and tremble

while

while they know, there is a God in Heaven, and a Conscience in their own bosoms, that curiously observe and record all. And just so it is in the present Case. A great many will seem to kiss *Christ* abroad in a Church, and at a publick Ordinance; who there so devout as they? They will cringe and bow to his very Name, *Jesus*; a great stir they make, but it is nothing else than a Complement; when they turn back upon the Church, they turn their back upon Christ too; and going home, they leave at the Church-door all the respect and kindness which they would be thought to have for him. But the Spouse was acted by another Principle; she carried the same dearness of affection to Christ along with her to all places where she came; and therefore she resolved not only to kiss him when she found him without, but likewise to *lead him, and bring him into her mothers house*; She would be as dear over him, and respective to him at home, as abroad; she would indeed be glad to meet him abroad, to meet him in the High-way of his Ordinances; thither she goeth, there she walks, and waits for that very purpose; she esteems Ordinances, because they are divine appointments, and have the stamp of God's Authority upon them; but she rests not in the bare enjoy-

ment

ment of them, but in and by them would have communion with Christ himself; and let her Sanctuary-sighs, and sense of his Power and Glory there, be never so clear and sweet, she would, for all them, long to have him at home; home would not be home to her, but a Wilderness, an Hell, if she could not have communion and an intercourse of kindness with Christ there.

And this which we find her in that place fixedly resolved to do, was no more than what she had formerly done, when she had been so happy as to meet with him. She had found it was a thing feasible; *Christ* was easie to be intreated; if desired, he would not refuse to come under her Roof; and she had found how much good she got by his Company, that in having Him with her, she had All in him. That she had done thus before, you may see in *Cant.* 3. 4. *It was but a little that I passed from them, but I found him whom my soul loveth.* And glad she was that she had found him; she did not repent of the great pains and many weary steps that she had taken in the search. But what did she do now that she had found him? She tells you, *I held him, and would not let him go.* I am perswaded *Christ* did not intend to leave her, he delights to stay where he is welcom and made much of; nothing drives him away,

way but unkindneſs. Yet true love is jealous and afraid: He hath withdrawn, and I did not know then how to be without him; when my Sun was gone, it was dark night with me; and therefore ſhe would make as ſure of him as ever ſhe could: He was too good to part with, therefore now ſhe had got him again, ſhe would keep him. If you ask, How long? ſhe tells you, *Till ſhe had brought him into her mothers houſe, and into the chamber of her that conceived her.* She was for ſecret Duty and Fellowſhip, Chamber-enjoyment and Communion.

And I think this may be taken for granted, that there is not any one truly gracious Soul, who knoweth what it is to have the ſweet gracious comfortable preſence of Chriſt, and what it is to lie and labour, ſigh and groan under his ſubductings and abſence, but will be of the ſame mind with the Spouſe; having recover'd his loſs, he will in a pang of love, and rapture of joy cry out, O thou whom my Soul loveth! haſt thou been gone ſo long, and have I been mourning and lamenting after thee ſo long, and ſeeking thee ſo diligently, going, and weeping as I went, dropping tears faſter than I took ſteps, and have I found thee at laſt! I will not part with thee: if thou wilt not take me up to thee, thou ſhalt not deny to go along

along with me; unless desires and longings are grown insignificant, unless Prayers and Tears have lost their wonted power, I will have thee to my House, to my Family, to my Chamber; I am now set for the greatest privacy, and for the sweetest intimacy: there will I pour out my fervent Prayers, and there I will humbly and patiently, yet with inflamed longings, attend thy pleasure, and wait thy gracious Answers.

We find that holy *Abraham* did erect Altars to God abroad, in the several places to which he came. God had his Tables for *Abraham*, and *Abraham* would have his Altars for God; God was very gracious, *Abraham* very ingenuous; God was bountiful, and *Abraham* grateful. At *Sichem* the Lord appeared to him, and there he built an Altar, and another he made near unto *Bethel*; and another in the Plain of *Mamre*. and doubtless, as he had his Altars, so his Sacrifices; as all places were witnesses of God's kindness to *Abraham*, so he would have them witnesses of his mindfulness of God. Yea, and as he had his Altars abroad, so, as you have already heard, he had his *Grove* at home; an Oratory, a place of Prayer, where he called on the Name of the *Lord*, the Everlasting God. There are those in the world, and among our selves, who

can

can find Altars abroad; and if there be none, they *will* make some; they had as lieve be without Churches, as without Altars: And oh! how do they admire them, as the most holy places, tho' there be no Sacrifice! and how do they plead for them, and stoop and bow to them! and herein they place a main piece of their Religion, tho' it be but a piece of foolish Superstition, if not something worse; from which God deliver *England* and other Reformed Churches, which do yet need a further Reformation. Well, these people have these things abroad; but suppose one should ask them, what they have at home? May they not say, We have rich Tables, full Cups, stately Chambers, Down-beds, yea, and Cards and Dice, Healthing and Ranting, Chambering and Wantonness? Yes, it is very probable: But what is there of the Service of God, of the Worship of God, of any Honour done to God? Nothing of all this; no, nothing at all. And art thou one of this number? then I earnestly desire thee to think with thy self, and seriously consider, what a profane place is thy Closet, in which there is no Prayer; how it stinks in God's nostrils: Whatever other Sweets thou maist have, where there is no holy Duty to perfume it; what a wicked place, what an Hell is thy Chamber;

Chamber, out of which the Glorious Majesty of Heaven is, so far as thou canst do it, excluded! If there be no Prayer there, then for certain there is no God there; I mean, by his gracious presence; and if there be no God there, then there are a thousand Devils.

But my chief design is not to deal at present with the gross and openly flagitious; I have no cause to wonder that they have no such thing as Prayer in their Chambers and Closets, who do by their loose, vicious and abominable Lives proclaim to all that know them, that there is no fear of God before their Eyes; I would indeed speak a thousand words to do their Souls good, and think my time and labour well bestowed: But now my business lieth among Professors, those of them who live in the shameful neglect of Secret Prayer, to whom I shall propound these four Questions, and let them consider what Answer they can give.

First, Art thou a Christian indeed, or art thou not?

Secondly, Dost thou make Religion thy business, or dost thou not?

Thirdly, What account dost thou make of God?

Fourthly,

Fourthly, Doth not thy Conscience charge thee with the omission of a Duty? I desire to deal faithfully with you, as one that must answer before my Judge; and oh that you would deal faithfully with your own Souls, for it is your great and everlasting Concern.

First, Art thou a Christian, or art thou not? I mean not in Profession only, but in reality; not in shew only, but in sincerity; not in word and in tongue only, but in deed and in truth? thou wilt answer, yes, I am a Christian, God forbid I should be otherwise. Thou sayst well, but the great business is to make it out. How dost thou prove it? Thou wilt, perhaps, answer, Thou hast been baptized: that is well too, that thy Parents did their duty in bringing thee to that sacred and solemn Ordinance of initiation, and thereby binding thee to the faith, fear and service of thy great Creator, and Lord Redeemer. But my Friend, Is that all thou hast to say for thy Christianity? Is that all the Evidence thou art able to produce? I cannot forbear telling thee, That Baptism (where there is that, and no more) doth make a company of pitiful Christians. There was an *Israelite* in

in shew, and an *Israelite* in deed. Wilt thou observe and make due use of that which *Paul* saith, *Rom.* 2. 28, 29. *He is not a Jew which is one outwardly, neither is that Circumcision, which is outwardly in the flesh; But he is a Jew which is one inwardly, and Circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter, whose praise is not of men, but of God.* And in the same sense I may say, that is not Baptism which is only outward, that is not enough to give the denomination; upon that single account Christ will not own a person for a Sheep of his Fold, a Member of his Body: that lays indeed, on all them that receive it, an obligation unto holiness, and it will greatly aggravate the sins which they afterward live in the wilful commission of; but it will not entitle them to Salvation, and everlasting happiness. 1 *Pet.* 3. 21. *Baptism doth now save us by the Resurrection of Jesus Christ*: possibly now thou thinkest thou hast enough. *Baptism saveth*, and what do I need more: but stay, let the Apostle explain himself, which he doth in the very same Verse. *Not the putting away the filth of the flesh*, by sprinkling water upon the face, according to most; or dipping in it, according to others; or plunging the whole body in it over head and ears, according to some;

neither this, nor that way will be sufficient and saving alone. The unregenerate Children of *Israel*, though circumcised, were unto God as the Children of the *Ethiopians*, *Amos* 9. 7. And as one saith, A man may go to Hell with the water of Baptism upon his face. *But*, saith *Peter*, *the answer of a good Conscience toward God.* When Conscience is able to give this testimony of a man, that he hath been baptized by the Holy Ghost, renewed in the spirit of his mind; that it is his desire to answer the Engagements in Baptism, to attain the blessed Ends of Baptism, and to approve himself to God, by walking as becomes one of his Covenant-people.

Now then let me put the Question to thee again; Art thou a Christian? hast thou been baptized into Christ? hast thou put on Christ? hath he got the possession of thine heart, and the supreme power and command in it? If thou art a Christian, be *uniform*; let thy whole life be of a piece. Linsey-woolsey Christians (bear with the expression) are abominable both to God and Men. What thou art, that be in all places; having put Christ on, keep him on, and walk up and down, every-where as a man in Christ, expressive of Christ, making him visible in thy life, and all the passages

of

of it. Do not thou carry like a Christian in the Congregation, and like an Heathen in the Closet. Since God is so very gracious as to admit thee into his House, to tread in his Courts, to sit down at his Table, to feast it with his Children upon marrow and fatness, dainties and spiced wine; be not thou so disingenuous and ungrateful as to shut him out of thy Chamber, when thou letteſt in the World and Sin. Holy *Paul*, speaking of himself, and others of the true Apostles, he saith, 2 *Cor.* 2. 14. *That God made manifest the savour of his knowledge by them in every place:* that was a very great and excellent work; they were not moral Preachers, but Gospel-preachers: They did not preach *Plutarch*, but *Jesus*. The Spouse had said, *Cant.* 1. 3. That *the name of her Beloved was as an ointment poured forth.* Now said *Paul*, I determined to know nothing among you but Jesus Christ, and him crucified; and all the Apostles were acted by the same Spirit, and inflamed with the same love to Christ: they took his name as a box of most precious Ointment; and wherever they came, they opened it, and made Christ known; and whereas the Gentile World was exceeding unsavoury, and all places did stink most wretchedly of their Idolatry; the Apostles perfum'd and sweet-

ned

ned, and brought into them the most delightful savour of the knowledge of the true God in Christ. Now accordingly I would have you act, if you be professors: make every place where you come, to savour of Religion; let all your Discourses have a savour of it; carry that savour with you into your Friends Houses, and publick Houses of intertainment; and be sure that in your own Houses, in your Chambers and Closets, you do make manifest the savour of that *knowledg* which you have of God, and of that true sincere love which you have for God. If you be Christians, be uniform, practice Christianity always, every-where.

Secondly, I would seriously propound this Question to thee, Dost thou make Religion thy business? I have not lived above Threescore Years in the World without making some Observations, and getting some knowledge of it; and I must needs say, I know a great deal more than is good. I have read many Books, and I have read Men too, though indeed many of them are crabbed pieces, not calie to be understood: But this I have found, and still do, to my sorrow, and to their shame, that many Persons among us do make a profession of Religion, who never indeed took it up, nor buckled to it as their Trade: they are not

altogether strangers, but will be doing something; but here's the mischief, it is only as a (παρεργον) business by the bye: their thoughts, and cares, and studies, are carried another way; their main work doth lie somewhere else, namely, in the World: that is the thing they are devoted to, and set their hearts upon, and spend their time and strength in the pursuit of; how they should get it, how they shall increase it, how they shall secure it, and how they shall inebriate themselves with the comforts, delights and pleasures of it. Whereas the gracious Soul, that is sound at the bottom, and that in truth which he would go for in the account and esteem of men, makes his Religion his great and principal work. *David* said, *Psal.* 109. 4. *I give my self unto prayer*; others give themselves over to sin. God gives them up to a reprobate mind, and to vile affections, and to their own hearts lusts, and they give themselves up, one to his drunkenness, and another to his uncleanness. Now *David* gave himself to prayer; and what he saith of Prayer in particular, is true as to Godliness in general; a godly Man gives himself up to it, he is addicted and devoted to it, he is all for that; and the truth is, none but such an one will do good upon it. Believe it, O Professors,

for

for your own experiences will in the end make my words good; none but such as do indeed make Religion their Trade, will thrive upon it, and grow rich toward God.

Now then, if thou dost indeed make Religion thy business, thou wilt heartily study, and do all thou canst to promote it; as you know the promoting of Trade is the matter of common discourse among men, and they are greatly set for it, they are glad to hear of any thing that will contribute thereunto. Now there is nothing in the World that doth forward a Christian more in this his great business, and that doth more promote the Trade of Godliness and Religion, than Secret Prayer doth. I am not willing to compare one Duty with another, or one Ordinance with another; for they are all of God; they are all stamp with his Authority, they are all great advantages to them that walk uprightly. God is more wise and gracious than to set his Servants about any unnecessary or unprofitable work; yet I will venture to say this concerning Secret Prayer, That it is in Religion like the Spring in a Watch, that causeth in all the Wheels a due and regular motion. You know that many Persons, who are well-moneyed men, have a stock going with others, as in the *African* and *East India* Company; but not satisfied

with that, they will have their Secret Stock also, and will trade by themselves: So here, the Saints and People of God should be trading, and have a great deal going in the common Stock, in publick Worship, in the Assemblies and Congregations of the Saints, *Psal.* 42. 4. Holy *David* did reckon it a brave time when *he went with the multitude to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holy day*, Psal. 122. 1. *He was glad when they said unto him, Let us go into the house of the Lord.* And it is prophesied and promised as a choice and singular blessing, *Isa.* 2. 3. That *many people shall go, and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob, and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths.* But it is not to be expected that they should thrive again, and grow very rich toward God, unless they have a Secret Stock going too, and will be trading by themselves in private, and keeping up that communion, correspondence and intercourse with God and Christ, which others do not know of. *David* was very much for Sanctuary lights and enjoyments; when he was deprived of them, he did seek and thirst, and long for them, *Psal.* 63. 1, 2. but still he was careful of, and busie at his home-trades, *Psal.* 55. 17. *Evening, morning, and at noon, will I pray and*

cry

cry aloud. And yet that was not enough for him, at that rate of working he could neither live, nor lay up as he would: therefore you read in *Psal.* 119. 164. It was his constant practice to be at *his praises of God seven times a-day.*

Thirdly, I would ask thee this Question, What dost thou think of God? what figure doth he make? I know, notwithstanding his unmatchable Excellencies, and infinite Perfections, he is very low in the thoughts of many, yea most; but I am now speaking to thee who art a Professor, and pretendest to a knowledge of him, and a love to him: But prithee, What room dost thou give him? where dost thou place him? dost thou deal becomingly with him? dost thou value and esteem him as a God ought to be valued? dost thou believe that he alone is more than all the Angels in Heaven, and all the Men on Earth put together? dost thou think that to have his Eye upon thee, is a far greater matter, than to have the Eyes of the best and greatest Persons upon Earth upon thee. It really is so, for what is all the World to God? what is Heaven and Earth to God? what is their loving thee, if he hate thee? what is their liking thee, if he loath thee? what is their approving and justifying thee, if he reject and

condemn thee? but I ask now, what thy thoughts are? and again, I ask, dost thou think, that to have his presence with thee, is more than to be in the most frequent and numerous Assembly, the most thronged Congregation? and certainly it is so: the presence of God alone should be more awing, and it is more delighting than that of any other.

Now if thou hast this high esteem for God, if thou makest this account of his presence, then remember, that *He seeth in secret.* So our Saviour tells us in the Text. His Eyes run to and fro in the Earth; not only in the High-ways, and broad Streets, but they look into Nooks and Corners also. He doth not only walk in the golden Candlesticks, but steps into Chambers and Closets too; as in *Ezek.* 9. 8. he order'd the *Prophet to dig in the wall*, and commanded him to go in and see the Abominations that were done there. And Verse 12. He speaks of what the *Ancients of the house of* Israel *did in the dark, every one in the chambers of his imagery.* Idolaters act their idolatry, and ungodly Men their wickedness as close as they can; they have darkness and walls to conceal it; but to God the darkness is as the light, and the night shineth as the day: and in the wall there is an hole, through which God's Eye looks and discovers all: and he that

can

can find an hole in the wall, hath also a window in the Chamber. Now if the Eyes of Men will make thee pray in thy Family, if they have such a powerful influence on thee as to fetch thee out of thy House, and draw thee to join with the Congregation in the Acts of Publick Worship; give me a reason, if thou hast one worth the giving, why the All-seeing Eye of the glorious and holy God, should not make thee pray in thy Chamber by thy self, since he doth most curiously observe thee there, though no body else doth. I think my self bound to tell thee, whether thou wilt believe and consider it or not, I must leave to thy self, That if thou dost neglect Secret Prayer, it is an evident sign that thou undervalu'st God; It is no less than a base slight put upon God: and *those that despise him, shall be lightly esteemed.*

Fourthly, Let me once more inquire of thee, what agreement is there between thee and thy Conscience? When you do not seek God, do you find and enjoy peace within? is Concience-quiet? doth it not quarrel with you? and make you feel its anger? I remember what the Apostle saith in *Rom.* 14. 22. *Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that which he alloweth*: that is sa-

tisfied about the thing which he doth, whatever others say against him, he is not self-condemned. So I may say, Happy is the man who condemneth not himself in the thing that he omitteth. Thou never prayest in secret, but art thou not in that wanting to thy duty? art not thou injurious both to God and thine own Soul? dost thou not withhold from him that which is his due? doth not thy Conscience tell thee, thou art wanting to thy duty; doth it not vote for it? doth it not upbraid thee with the neglect? doth it not sometimes flee in thy face, and charge it upon thee, and put thee into a Little-ease? I think, I have said enough in the Doctrinal part for the proving it to be thy Duty; And hath not thy Conscience gone along with those things, and subscribed to them as the Truths of God? And if so, what account wilt thou be able to give unto thy supream Lord for thy not giving ear to his Vicegerent, that he himself had appointed and set up in thy bosome? How wilt thou answer him, when he shall say, Why didst thou not attend to the dictates of thy Conscience? why didst thou not do that which thy Conscience told thee thou wast bound to do? How dost thou think to come off? what plea wilt thou use at the last and great

day,

day, when thy heavenly Master shall say, I have not found thy works perfect before me, they have not been filled up, here hath been an huge Chasme, a great vacancy; I have been forgotten and neglected by thee when thou wast alone; thou wouldest not do me service when thou hadst nothing else to do; thou wouldest rather sit still nodding in thy Chair, than take the pains to give me a visit. We are commanded, *always to abound in the work of the Lord*, 1 Cor. 15. *verse* last. How darest thou then to omit so considerable, so sweet and so necessary a part thereof, especially when thy Conscience perswaded and called thee to it? Conscience will be heard sooner or later, in one way or other; if you will not hear its softer Counsels, you shall its louder Thunders; if you will not follow its Directions, it will pursue you with its Terrors. In a word, if you will not attend to the Dictates of Conscience, you shall feel the Fury of it; and when you feel it, you will find it intollerable.

Having thus ordered our those Reproofs which I judged necessary upon occasion of this Text, and begging they may take place, and be accompanied with a blessing upon those who are guilty before God in one of these respects or other; I come to speak

unto you in a way of hearty and serious exhortation: I do in the Bowels of Love and with great earnestness, intreat and beseech you, who are yet altogether, or too great strangers to it, to set forthwith upon this excellent Duty of Secret Prayer; and oh, that by the concurrence, and effectual working of the Divine Spirit, I might prevail with you. I can say, to the glory of God, and desire to do it with thankfulness, That these Discourses, when Preached, were not without some fruit; oh that now I have been put upon the Publishing of them, they may go and bring forth much more fruit! Do not stand *arguing* the case; it is a Thousand pities that any part of that should be made matter of Dispute, which is, or ought to be a matter of Practice. Do not *procrastinate* and put it off; Why shouldest thou say, To morrow, when it should be done to day, and it may be thou shalt not have a morrow to do it in? Fall immediately upon the performance. When the *Spouse* would not open at the first knock, and importunate call, but lay still, asking questions, and making excuses; when she reflected upon her unkindness, found her Bowels troubled within her, and rose up and opened to her Beloved, He to her grief and cost had withdrawn himself, and was gone. *David's* ex-

ample

ample doth command and deserve our imitation, who could say, *Psalm* 119. 60. *I made haste, and delayed not to keep thy commandments.* I beseech you, out of hand, answer the call; make your Houses *Churches*, and your Chambers *Oratories*; send up such Prayers as may come before God like Incense; and be in his Nostrils a sweet-smelling savour.

Though Man be a sociable creature, and his nature carries him out to desire of communion, and it is not good for him to be *always* alone; yet it is best for him to be *sometimes* alone. It will certainly conduce much to your advantage, *to converse frequently with your selves*, to search curiously into your own hearts, that you may understand the better their frame and constitution; to be asking your selves such important questions as no body else can answer; and diligently enquire how matters stand with you, whether you thrive or go backward. A Merchant sees it necessary for him to be in his Counting-house, as well as upon the *Exchange*: whatever you do, O Christians, be not strangers at home, be self-studied, and self-acquainted. And at other times, yea, and in the same retirement, before you return to your secular affairs, it will be for your interest *to be conversing with your God*;

you

you never go to him in a becoming manner, but he gives you something that is worth your while; a gracious Soul gets something, even when as to its present sense and feeling it gets nothing. In a Winter season, though the Branches of the Tree look as if they were dead, the Root is often water'd.

Tell me, O Christian, Have there not been such times in which thou hast found God speaking to thee? *Elihu*, indeed, saith, Job 33. 14. *God speaketh once, yea, twice, yet man perceiveth it not.* Many a Man is so careless, that he doth neither understand God, nor mind; he doth not perceive *what* God saith, what his meaning is, it is all a strange Language to him, and he doth not perceive *that* God speaks; he doth not think that God saith any to him. *Isa.* 26. 11. *Lord, when thine hand is lifted up, they will not see.* No, they shut their eyes, and are willingly ignorant; and as they will not *see* when God's hand is lifted up, so they will not *hear* when God's voice is lifted up. The Saints if well, and in health, have all their senses exercised; but wicked men have none of their senses exercised about the things of God. But hast thou not perceived God speaking to thee, once, yea twice, in *divers manners?* By his Providences, frown-

frowning and smiling, prosperous and adverse? by his Word and Ministers? by his Holy and Blessed Spirit, and by thine own Conscience, which he hath awakened when it was drowsy and sleeping, and opened its mouth, and put words into it that it should say to thee? Hath he not spoken to thee, at *divers seasons*? In a dream, when thy eyes were shut, and when awake; abroad and at home; when in company, and when alone; when up, and when laid, *in a vision of the night*, as *Elihu* said, *when deep sleep falleth upon men; in slumberings upon the bed*. And he hath spoken to thee to divers purposes; sometimes Precepts to direct thee, sometimes Promises to revive thee; now a Rebuke, then a Cordial; at one time Trouble, and at another time Peace: Thus, according to thy case and exigency, he hath varied his Applications.

Now, hath God spoken so often to you, and do you find nothing to say to God? Will you be always in the possession, and under the power of a dumb Devil? Are you so full of goodness and comfort, so rich in knowledg and grace, so increased in mercies and blessings of all sorts, that you have no more to ask? Do you find that to be a *Canaan*, a Heaven, which others call a Wilderness, because of pinching wants,

wants, and pricking Thorns, and Beasts of prey? Is your mouth so filled as that you need no more to open it wide? nay, not at all. Remember how *Laodicea* was mistaken about her own case, pleasing her self in such high, but vain conceits, when, indeed, she was wretched, and poor, and miserable, and blind, and naked, *Rev.* 3. 17. Are things so well with thee, that thou hast no reason for a sigh, nor room for a groan? Is it so throughly and perfectly well with thy Soul, with thy Body, with thine Estate, with thy Family and Relations, with the Nation and Church of God, that thou hast no complaint to make to him, not one boon to beg of him? Is thy day so serene and fair, that there is no cloud appearing? Is there no sin within that is too hard for thee? Doth it never war against the Law in thy mind? or doest thou immediately knock it down, and get a complete victory at thy first entrance into the field? Hast thou quite shaken off that body of death which poor *Paul* could not for his heart get rid of, but carried up and down with him? Or hath it grown less troublesome, and ceased to stink in thy Nostrils? Is there no burthen upon thy back that is too heavy for thee? Is there no wound in thy Conscience that puts thee to pain? is there no plague in thine

thine heart that needs a cure? If thou beest, indeed, a Believer, a Man or Woman in Christ, I grant the cure is begun, and dare assure thee, that being in the hand of so great a Physician, it shall be carried on; but what, is it perfected already? In a word, is there nothing at all that troubles thee? or hast thou nothing to say to God in private? what, nothing, but what thou wouldest have every body hear and know? But I pass by that at present; we shall by-and by have a fitter opportunity of speaking more concerning it.

Come, come, Christian, be thine own Friend, better than ever thou hast been yet, and without more ado be perswaded to get alone, and shut thy door, and fall down upon thy knees, and pour out thy Soul into the bosom of thy heavenly Father; I am confident, if thou wilt begin it in good earnest, thou wilt not easily give it over. I do not, indeed, know what interruption the Devil may give thee, who hates all the Work of God, and good of Man; but if, by temptation, thou shouldest for a time be taken off from it, thou wilt not be well, nor able to enjoy thy self till thou dost return to it again. I dare say, in an humble, holy, and believing performance, thou wilt experience such incomparable sweetness, and

so

so much benefit and advantage accruing to thee, that thou wilt go on, and call upon God as long as thou livest, and then expire thy Soul in the same manner as *Stephen* did, whose last words were Prayer, *Acts* 7. 59. *Lord Jesus receive my spirit*; and, *Lord lay not this sin to their charge*; and *when he had said this, he fell asleep*. That which I have further to do, will be in these two things:

1. Lay down Motives to the work.
2. Give Directions for managing it.

I shall begin with the Motives for the alluring and drawing you to this excellent work, who have hitherto been altogether strangers to it, or very backward, and by consequence inconstant, off and on; and I shall most heartily rejoice, if the Lord would graciously please to succeed these endeavours, so that what I shall suggest to you, may bring you upon your knees; that there may be more of this Chamber-practice, more of a Chamber-fellowship, and Closet-communion with your God. The Motives are these:

First, Do you pray in secret, because that God, who is the proper Object of Prayer, seeth in secret; as trusting in him, you do

at no time, and in no condition, trust in a God that cannot save; so directing your Prayers to him, you do in no place pray unto a God that cannot hear. When *Hagar* had in a fear fled from the face of her incensed Mistress, God found her out in the Wilderness, where she was absconded, and appeared and spake unto her there; whereupon it is said in *Gen.* 16. 13. *That she called the name of the Lord that spake unto her, Thou God seest me; for she said, Have I also here looked after him that seeth me?* We may, as some do, reckon these words to be words of reprehension, as relating to her self; and words of admiration, as referring to God, *Have I also looked after him!* Here I am, but how stupid and foolish have I been! I have been looking back to the Comforts which I had when in the Family, and under the wing of my Master *Abraham*; and I have been looking to the displeasure and severity of my Mistress *Sarah*, and I have been looking to the desolate place and distressed condition into which I am now brought: but have I here minded God, and looked after God? I have been so afflicted with my loss, and have pored so much upon my troubles, that I have been unmindful of God, did find neither heart nor leisure to think of Him, or look after Him: (a Case it is too common among

among the children of men! yet *here he seeth me*, and minds me; here he looks upon my person, and upon my affliction and sorrow. And maist not Thou, my Friend, say the very same, when thou art alone, and in thy Closet-recesses, *Thou God seest me?* When no soul living is by, when no mortal eye seeth me, then *Thou God seest me.* Now let me desire thee, after that serious consideration, to propound this as a serious Question to thy self; Have I also here looked after him that seeth me? God's eyes have been here upon me; but have mine eyes been again upon God, and unto God? It may be, thou art able to say, In the publick Congregation I have looked after that God who seeth me, there I have had many, frequent, repeated, and raised thoughts at him; there I have waited for him more than they that watch for the morning, yea, more than they that watch for the morning. But when thou art in thy Chamber, canst thou make thy Appeal to God, and say, *O Lord, thou knowest, and art my witness, that even here I have looked after thee that seest me; here mine eyes of Faith and Prayer have been toward the Lord that seeth me?*

This is an Argument which our dear Lord Jesus maketh use of in the Text, That *your Father seeth in secret.* The Royal Prophet saith,

saith, *Psalm* 139. 7. *Whither shall I go from thy Spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence?* The Question speaks it a thing impossible to be done. His eye is fastned upon thee, and follows thee whithersoever thou goest: look to thy self, and ponder all thy actions; thou art under the pure and piercing, and all-discerning eye of the infinitely Great and Glorious Majesty, when thou art in the Congregation, and in the Street, and in the Shop, and in the Kitchen, yea, and when thou art in the Closet too. And since he doth see thee there, what wouldst thou have him see thee doing? wouldst thou have him see nothing but vanity in thy mind, and corruption in thy heart? wouldst thou have him see nothing done by thee, but looking into thy Glass, and into thy Chests and Bags, or turning over thy Fineries and Fooleries, and so feeding thy Wantonness and Pride; or making provision for a perishing Carkass, to deck and adorn it; or gratifie a brutish and sensual Appetite: but never see thee upon thy knees, seeking his face and favour, or the good of thine own precious and never-dying Soul?

Oh that *His Eye* might affect *your Hearts*! That Divine Eye which is upon all your ways, and looks you thorow and thorow;

That

That Eye which is ten thousand times, yea inconceivably more than the eyes of all the Angels in Heaven, and of all the Men upon Earth. The Eye of God should, among others, have these two effects upon us, and upon all men that know and own him. *First*, It should awe us; *Secondly*, It should quicken and animate us. It should awe us when we are in secret, and be an effectual curb to those Lusts and Corruptions which would otherwise break loose and grow rampant. When no body is by, do not dare to sin, because God is by. This preserved young *Joseph* from falling before a great temptation. When he might have procured the favour of his Mistress, and, as some would have thought, have done himself a kindness; this thought brake the neck of the temptation, *How shall I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?* Again, the Eye of God should animate and put life into you; it should, as a golden Spur, quicken you to the careful and lively performance of Duty when you are in secret, and no body at hand to take notice of it, and make report. Let it be enough for you, enough alone, that God seeth your love to him, and the desires of your Souls to his Name, and a remembrance of him, and communion with him; and He needs none to inform him of your

unmindfulness and neglect of him; no, no, He seeth it himself; He seeth where your thoughts are, He understands them afar off, and He seeth where your hearts are: so it appears by the charge he gave out against *Israel* of old, *This people draweth near unto me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me.* And I would fain know of you, how it is possible but that he should take it very unkindly at your hands, and be highly offended, if that he should be slighted by you, who is so excellent and glorious in himself, and so absolutely necessary for you, and unto whom you are so everlastingly beholden and obliged? How can he otherwise chuse but be angry with you, if in your leisure-time, and at your spare hours, you will not give him a visit; if you cannot find in your hearts to bestow some of that time upon him, which you have to spare from your earthly Friends, and worldly Business? When he seeth this, how canst thou think but that his fury will come up into his face?

Secondly, Praying in secret is a very good and comfortable sign of sincerity. I do not say that it is a certain and infallible sign, and that every one that sets upon this work hath indeed the Spirit of Adoption, and may

from

from thence arrive to an assurance of Sonship, and draw an undeniable conclusion, *That he is born again*: for I do very well know, there is no external act of Religion which an hypocrite may not set his hand to. As Reputation and Credit among men may bring them out to publick Ordinances, so that *they shall come as the people cometh; and sit before their Minister as the people sitteth, and hear his words*, Ezek. 33. 31. so an enlightned, awakened, uneasie and importunate Conscience may bring them upon their knees in private. An hypocrite's heart is really in no piece of the work of God; while he draws neareſt to him with his lips, that is far from him: how indeed can he raise that up to God, which he hath set upon his iniquity? Yet he may have a finger in every thing that is of the out-side. *Jehu* knows how to be zealous against Idolatry, and for the Lord, what so to be, paves his way to a Throne, but when he has once got it, and is warm in it, he himself would be as bad as any, 2 *King.* 10. 31. *Jehu took no heed to walk in the Law of the Lord God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.* *Saul* would sacrifice, but was too hasty at it; and a *Pharisee* would pray in the *Temple* and *Synagogue*, while their hearts run after their Covetousness, and would

would not be obedient to the Word of God, would yet go out to hear it: And I do not know, but persons of the like Spirits and Principles, as rotten at heart as any of them, may set upon Religious Actions when they are alone; they may, when by themselves, take up a Bible, or good Book, and read in it; and they may, when there is need, fall upon their knees, and offer up their requests unto God. An hypocrite may be at duty in his Closet, tho' his heart never be with God in duty, neither in his Closet, nor any where else.

But now observe, this is not so acceptable to him, it is not that which he takes pleasure and delight in; he is put upon it, he is under a force; Conscience offers violence, and drags him into it, as *Joab* when the Law Justice would take hold on him at the last, tho' it is probable, he never had any great love for the Altar, yet then he would flee and catch hold of the Horns of it, and would even die there. But I say this is not the matter of their delight, they do it not so much out of choice, as out of constraint; it is not that which they take pleasure in; and because it is not their *pleasure*, therefore it is not their *practice*. They may do such a thing now and then in a fit, a fraught, when

when they are put to a pinch; but they do not make it their Trade. Our Saviour tells us where we are most like to meet with them, if we have a mind to find them at their Devotions; that is, *in the Synagogues and the corners of the streets.* If you would find them in their wickednesses; for hypocrites are Villains, they make use of Religion for no other end, but as a Cloak to cover their Knavery; and there is a great deal of that, which some of them are guilty of, God is pleased now and then to pluck off their Masques: and oh what Deformities do then visibly appear in their lives and conversations! When their Paint is once off, there are no persons so ugly. But, as I was saying, if you would find them in their wickednesses, then look for them in dark, and in holes; it is not for their interest, it is inconsistent with their design, to be so impudent and brazen-fac'd as the profane Crew, who glory in their shame; no, these are sneaking wretches, who would hide their sins, and no body know of them. But if you would find them at their Devotions, do but listen, and you may possibly hear their Trumpet sound; or if not, the best way is to look for them in some noted and frequented places, the Synagogues, and corners of streets. Publick places are the fittest

hypocrite

pocrites haunts, for they are most convenient and proper for the carrying on of their design, which is not to be *approved of God*, but *seen of men*.

And this I say, Though secret Prayer, and the performance of other duties of Godliness in secret, be not a *certain and infallible* Argument of an heart renewed by Grace, and upright with God; yet it is a *very good* Argument. Tho' it be not such an Evidence of Grace, as alone will put it out of all doubt and question, yet it is a good Evidence, and will do much in a cumulative way, and in conjunction with other things. And tho' he may be a wicked man, who doth several things that every good man cannot but do; yet he cannot be a good man, who doth not do those things. A *wicked man* may be found in a good way; but he is not a *good man*, who always turns his back upon a good way, and doth never walk in the Law of the Lord. So here, tho' he may be an *Hypocrite*, who doth pray in secret, yet he cannot be a *Saint* who never prays in secret: He who doth not desire and maintain secret Communion *with God*, hath not, whatever his pretences may be, an heart indeed set *for God*. The hearts of men are curiously searched into now, and they shall all be openly discover'd at the last; and when the day of manifestation

shall come, he that now is not for being *with God*, when he is alone, will then be found and condemned as one that hath not been *for God at all*. And this I do positively lay down as an undeniable Truth, *That love to fellowship with God in secret, doth speak a real love to God.* Tho' a person may pray in secret, and yet be unsound and rotten; yet a person hath an heart sound in God's Statutes, who so prays in secret, as not to be satisfied with the work done, unless he be with God in it; *i. e.* sensibly find God coming to him with the communications of his Grace, and the sweet discoveries of his Covenant-love; or, at least, his soul working out to God in holy desires and longings.

Thirdly, Thou canst not but be conscious to thy self of a great many secret sins with which thou art chargeable before God; and is there not a great deal of reason why thou shouldst perform secret Duties, where thou didst commit secret Sins? and that those places should be witnesses of thy fear of God, and love to him, which have been frequent witnesses of thy neglect of God, and rebellion against him? There are, indeed, those who commit uncleanness with greediness, and act sin with highest impudence: they do so dearly love and delight in

it, that they are not at all ashamed of it, but can without a blush do the Devil's drudgery, the dirtiest and basest of his work. Hence as in one place this is the complaint, *They draw iniquity with cords of vanity, and sin as with cart-ropes*; so in another place, *viz. Isa.* 3. 9. the complaint is thus: *They declare their sin as Sodom, and hide it not*; no, not they, but like some who think they can mend what a better than they have made, they carry their black spots in their very faces, and *glory in their shame, Phil.* 3. 19. Formerly, indeed, men were more modest; they cast a Mantle over their Nakedness, and did the works of darkness in the dark. *Paul* saith, in his time, *They that were drunk, were drunk in the night*: but now wickedness is grown more common, and men more audacious, and they do not avoid the light of the Sun, nor the eyes of men: the open street and the noon-day are thought now as convenient time and place as any other: they are grown *so desperate*, that they care not what they do, they will run upon the mouth of the Cannon, *the bosses of God's Buckler*; and *so impudent*, that they care not who seeth them: as 2 *Sam.* 16. 22. *There was a tent spread for Absalom upon the top of the house, and Absalom went in unto his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.* Yea, these wretches,

when they have acted to their utmost, and sinned as they could, do not yet so tire and weary themselves in the Devil's service, but that they will find something to do at home, and give some stroaks there to the further pleasing of their tyrannical Lord, and gratifying their insatiate Lust. The Scripture speaking of uncleanness, tells us of eyes that *cannot cease to sin*, cannot brook an intermission, they are not *at rest* any longer than they are *at work*: they are looking round about for new Objects, and every such Object inflames them, and by it away they are carried to fresh transports of defiling folly and madness.

But I have dwelt too long upon these Vassals of Satan, and sworn Votaries of the Flesh: let us turn our thoughts another way, and consider whether the Children of God themselves have not their secret Vanities, Follies, and Extravagancies? When didst thou so put off the Old Man, that there was none of his deeds to be found in thine hands? What stream hath flowed from thee, which hath run clear; nay, what drop that was perfectly pure? Name that place, if thou canst, in which thou hast not done more than enough to pollute thy Soul, to wound thy Conscience, to offend and provoke thy God? Ask thy own Conscience.

O Chri-

O Christian, and let that tell thee, Hath not God seen thy pride in thy Closet, and thy worldly-mindedness? hath he not been privy and eye-witness to thy unbelief and shameful distrusts of his fatherly Love and Care? hath he not been acquainted with thy froward passions and swelling discontents, when at any time his Providence run cross to thy humour, or seemingly to thine interest? hath he not heard thy murmurings and repinings, when thou couldst not get the good thing thou hadst a mind to, or didst lose what thou hadst set thy heart too much upon? Possibly, many of these things thou hast forgotten, but God hath them sealed up in a Bag; they are all in the light of his Countenance. I have often considered those expressions of holy *David*, who was a *precious* Saint, tho' his great miscarriages spake him far from a *perfect* one; and I do advise you to consider them too, and heartily wish you would. *Psal.* 19. 12. *Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.* It is a thing utterly impossible for man to understand himself perfectly: it is a mercy for him to understand his way, but he cannot understand all his deviations. As a Christian doth not understand his progress, so not his wandrings; and as for his faults, there are some of them so secret, that tho

he be very circumspect and wary, tho' he doth with utmost diligence study himself, his heart, and life, yet he doth not know them; they are secret, *some of them, to him*; he doth *not know them to be sins*; they seem lawful unto him, when they are not so; his ways are right in his own eyes, but not in God's eyes, which are purer than his; some of them he doth *not take any notice of*: such is our foolish incogitancy, that many actions pass from us, which we do not seriously ponder before we do them, neither do we with any due deliberation reflect upon them when done. Again, a man hath other faults open to him; they stare him in the face, and his own Conscience doth roundly tell him of them; but there is a veil of darkness drawn over them, so that they are *secret to all the world beside*. Some are such Masters in the Black-Art, that they can lead a very bad Life, and yet keep a very good Name. Oh! what abominations did the *Ancients of the house of Israel do in the dark!* Ezek. 8. *Every man in the chambers of his imagery!* Will you be persuaded to sit down a little, and take a review of your lives, and consider what iniquities you commit in the Chambers *of your privacy*? how many are they, and how great? You your selves know most of that, tho' I know nothing. Your own Consciences will tell you

you what no body else can; I advise and beseech you to consult them, and to give them leave to speak all they have to say: do not stop their mouths, nor hold the truth in unrighteousness. And let us now bring this to the business in hand, and see if there be not something of weight and cogency in the Argument: Have you your secret Sins, and will you not have your secret Duties? Have you your secret Provocations, and is it not fit that you should have your secret Supplications? Will you not seek his face, where you sin to his face? Oh! look carefully to it, that as there are secret Faults, so there be secret Prayers and Tears; as secret Sins, so secret Services.

Fourthly, There are special and momentous Causes and Reasons for secret Prayer. Surely there is not that Man nor Woman to be found upon the face of the earth, but hath something or other which he would by all means have a Mantle of privacy thrown over; something or other which he may be free and willing to whisper in the ear of a prudent intimate Friend, and lock up in his bosom: but he would not have it divulg'd and come abroad to the knowledge of every body. Now let me ask thee, Hast thou no-

thing to speak to God in his ear, something which thou wouldst not have any person in the world acquainted with; something, it may be, that doth greatly oppress thee, and whilst thou dost smother it altogether in silence, thy heart is almost broken within thee? There is an absolute necessity of giving vent, and thereby some ease to thine over-burden'd mind: and where canst thou do it with more freedom, and greater hope of relief, than when thou art alone before a gracious God, whose mercies are everlasting, and his compassions do not fail?

Will that, which they call *Common-Prayer*, reach thy *whole Case*? doth it contain in it all that is in thine heart? dost thou find every one of thy wants mention'd there? every one of thy groans form'd there? every one of thy desires drawn up there? is there nothing singular and peculiar in thy Case? is it exactly stated by others in all the particularities of it? I am sure, the Wise Man tells us, *Prov.* 14. 10. *The heart knoweth his own bitterness, and a stranger intermeddleth not with his joy.* These things are so lock'd up in the heart of a man, that no body else hath a key to let him into them. I think it is most proper for a poor diseased Patient to tell his Physician how he feels himself: indeed if he be so disturbed in his reason, or

so

so much enfeebled, that he cannot do it, then it is necessary for some other to do it, that hath been about him, and curious in his Observations: but I am of the mind, that the wise Physician will like that account best, which comes from his Patient's own mouth, supposing him capable of giving one. Do thou go and do so to thy great and ever-blessed Physician, the holy God; and to that end, study both *his Word* and *thy Heart*; that by studying his Word, thou maist come to know how *it should be* with thee; and by studying thine own heart, thou maist know how *it is* with thee, and then go and tell him.

Again, will *Publick-Prayer* at all times become thee, and in every one of thy concernments? Hast thou so much of an unspotted innocency, or such a large measure of confidence, as that thou wilt not blush to tell the whole story of thine heart and life upon the House-top? Hast thou been so undefiled in the way, that thou needest not care who knows what thou hast *been*, and what thou hast *done*? Indeed, when a proud and self-conceited *Pharisee* makes it his business to display his glory, and to trumpet out his own commendations, to tell God that he is a *Phœnix*, a kind of *none such* in the World, one that is so free

from common defilements, so abundant in goodness and acts of goodness, that his fellow is scarce to be met with; it is no wonder to find him ambitious of having Auditors enough, and to see him in the pride of his countenance, and with his hand by his side, strutting it to the Temple, where he doth expect a great confluence of people, who might go and inform others what great things they had heard concerning him from his own mouth, and so raise to him Thousands of admirings among such as would be credulous, and believe him upon his bare word: But methinks when a poor *Publican*, that groans under an heavy burthen of sin and guilt, who knoweth himself unable to answer for one of a Thousand, and who hath had often and often the sentence of death in himself, pronounced by his own awakened and wounded Conscience; when, I say, he is to draw up an Indictment against himself, and to read it in the presence of his righteous Judge, and then, having so done, to beg upon his knees, and plead hard for his Life, *Lord be merciful to me a sinner.* He may stand a great way off, and get alone by himself as a person ashamed, and even confounded. When thou goest to acquaint God with thy diseases, foul loathsom diseases of Soul, and to

open

open thy Artery Sores, and those wounds in thy Conscience, which as poor *David* found and owned, stink and are corrupt, it speaks an humble modesty, and doth highly become thee to do it between him and thee alone. Now, Christian, give me leave to deal particularly with thee, and to come as close as I can, and to propound some few Questions to thee, and to desire thee to propound them to thy self when I have done.

1. Hast thou not some secret sins to confess to God? Hast thou been all thy days so sober, and righteous, and godly, so circumspect and exact, that no action of thine troubles thee, or will reflect dishonour upon thee, or in the least put thee out of countenance? is there no blot in thy Escutchion, no dead Fly in thy Box of Ointment? Are there not some things done by thee which no body doth know of, and which thou wouldest not for more than I will say, have any body know of? Let this bring thee to Secret Prayer, for thy sins to confess. Indeed, unless it be in some cases, thou dost not need to do it unto Men; there is no necessity for thee to proclaim and publish thine own shame, particular Confession, which the Popish Priests do re-

quire

quire, is an abomination. But a Confession there must be, else the wound of Conscience will not be healed, the oppressed Spirit will not be relieved, the Sin will not be taken out, the Sin will not be pardoned. The Promise is, *He that confesseth and forsaken his sin, shall find mercy*; as much as he needs or can desire. And the word of Truth gives us this assurance, 1 *John* 1. 9. That *if we confess our sins, God is just and faithful to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* Blessed be God for those words, *from all.* Pardoning Mercy, and Justifying Grace, will make thorow work where-ever it comes; it takes away iniquity, transgression and sin, all sorts and sizes, sins of all kinds and degrees. But where doth this take place? Only in them that Confess. Where there is no Confession, you cannot with reason hope for a Remission. Add this, You may very well spread before God those sins which you have committed in secret, because *it is not in your power to hide them from him*, they are all in the light of his countenance, he understands them already, for he counts thy steps, and tells thy wanderings, he knoweth every act of sin which thou hast done, and every circumstance with which that act is cloathed. Psalm 50. 21. *I will reprove thee, and set them*

them in order before them. Upon which words Reverend Mr. *Dickson* hath this passage, *Sins forgotten, cast behind the back, and thrown into confusion by the secure sinner, shall in the day of God's reckoning be brought to remembrance, with time, place, and other circumstances, and so presented to the Conscience, as the sinner shall not be able to look aside from his fearful accusation,* or to deny any part of it. And the only way to prevent God's charging them upon us to our confusion and everlasting condemnation, is for us to confess them unto him with contrition and self-abhorrency; therefore do you go and do it quickly and fully. Yea further, *it is your duty, you ought to do it;* for thereby you give him glory. Josh. 7. 19. *Joshua said unto Achan, My son, Give, I pray thee, glory to the Lord God of Israel, and make confession unto him.* Thou didst greatly dishonour him by thy foul sins, but thou wilt honour him by thy humble and free confession, as it is an owning and acknowledgment of his Omniscience; there is no need of doing this openly and before others, unless it be where the sin is open, and others by it scandalized. Open and full Confession of secret sins before Men, is not, or may not be in all cases safe; it may not be *safe for others*, because of the bad example, by

which

which they may be infected; and it may not be *safe for thy self*, but expose thee to punishment. To be sure, Men cannot heal thy Soul, nor wash away thy filthiness, nor lay the furious storm which is in thy Conscience, but they may reproach and blemish thy name, and give such a fatal blow and wound to thy reputation, as cannot be cured without a scar, while thou breatheſt.

2. Art thou not sensible of base corruptions in thy heart? vile Lusts which lurk and lodge in thy bosome? Are they not often troublesome and vexatious to thee? do they not stink in thy Nostrils, when they stir in thy Soul? and are they not frequently too too powerful and prevalent? Thou hast oftentimes, perhaps, *horrible and blasphemous thoughts*, those *fiery Darts of the Devil* are with a strong hand thrown into thy mind, and do so startle and affright thee, that thou art a burthen and terror to thy self, and even weary of thy Life; at other times thou hast *filthy, unclean, and lascivious thoughts*, which would be fitter for a Goat or Dog than for a reasonable creature, who should be able to govern and command himself; and then again, thy mind being like the raging Sea that cannot rest, but continually casting up mire and dirt; there ap-

appear *cruel, malicious and revengeful thoughts*, yea, and in thy very Duties, thy most sacred solemn attendances upon God, thou aboundest with *vain, foolish and impertinent thoughts*. And now, I ask thee, Wouldest thou have all know what a vile Nature, and wretched heart thou hast? how that loathsome dunghill is sending forth its unsavory smells? what a filthy scum is continually rising up? and what vermin overspreads and covers the face of thy Soul, which should have *the beauty of the Lord its God upon it*? No, no, I am perswaded, thou wouldest not have thy dearest Friend privy to all this for a World; if others should know that by thee, which thou doest know by thy self, thou wouldest be ashamed to shew thy head: Let this then drive thee to thy Secret Prayer. A Person that labours under the Foul Disease, and desires a Cure, will go in private and acquaint his Physician, whose silence he dares promise himself. God is the great and only Physician of Souls, go and tell him thy Case, who hath graciously and faithfully promised that he will not tell again, but so *pardon* as to *cover*. To this purpose, read what himself hath said and given us under his hand, Ezek. 33. 16. *If the wicked turn from his sin, and do that which is lawful and right, none of*

his

his sins that he hath committed shall be mentioned to him. They shall not be *charged* upon him; had it been said so, it would have been an admirable mercy; but that is not all, Divine Mercy doth not stop there, they shall *not be mentioned*, but buried in Eternal Oblivion, and carried into the Land of forgetfulness. As they shall not be charged upon him to his *condemnation*, so they shall not be mentioned to his *reproach*. God will take care not only of his Peoples *souls*, but likewise of their *names*. James 5. 11. *Ye have heard of the patience of Job.* Yes, and we have heard of the passions of *Job*, his cursing the day of his birth; but hold, not a word of that, it now is as if it had never been.

3. Let me propound to you one Question further; Hast thou nothing to ask of God? Is there not some secret boon and kindness which thy heart carrieth thee out to the desiring of at the hands of God? such a *scruple* in thy Conscience, which puts thee to pain, and wouldest gladly have taken out, but canst not by all thy study and endeavours remove: and such a *blot* in thine evidence for thy being in a state of grace and having a title to the glory and happiness of the other World, which puts thee to a stand, so that thou canst not read on, nor

make any thing of it to thy comfort and satisfaction? this thou would not have others know, but desirest a deliverance from. Thou hast such a *good purpose and excellent design* in thy head, which thou knowest not how to communicate, yet thou wouldest be directed, assisted and prospered in. Thou hast, perhaps, *a yoke-fellow*, that is a Son of *Belial*, doth not know the duty of his place; or though he knows it, he will not do it; but is a thorn in thy side, and makest thee go mourning all the day; and thou lovest him so well, and art so tender of his reputation, that thou wilt not tell the dearest Friend thou hast of it; and I commend thy prudence and affection, bear it as long and as well as ever thou canst; but thou mayst do both him and thy self a singular kindness by telling thy God of it. Thou hast an *unnatural and disobedient Child*, who came out of thine own Bowels, and whom thou lovest as thy own Soul, but he neither fears God, nor reverenceth man; he is so far from following the good counsel thou givest him, that he will not so much as hear it; thou canst not think of him without breathing a sigh, scarce see him without dropping a tear, and thy Soul doth even break with the longings it hath to see him another man, a new man, convinced, converted, sanctified, turned

turned from his disobedience to the wisdom of the just, and brought over from the power of Satan to God; thou wouldst have more of the love and kindness of such an one as thou art nearly related to, or hast great dependence upon: These things, and, possibly, twenty more, which may be reckoned up, are very much the matter of thy desire, and all of them are within the reach of the Divine Power: That *God who performed all things for David*, is able to perform all these things for thee: and if thou wouldest not willingly have others acquainted with these things, if thou art loath that thy Family should be privy to the stirrings and workings of thy heart in these respects, then let them bring thee upon thy knees in thy secret Retirements; there thou mayst be bold, and as free as thou pleasest; there thou mayst fully open thy case, and unbosome thy self, and tell God all that is in thine heart, and keep back nothing: after the manner of holy *David*, who could say in *Psal.* 38. 9. *All my desire is before thee, and my groaning is not hid from thee.*

Fifthly, The pleasantness of the work is enough to attract and draw an holy Soul to the performance of it. Secret Prayer brings the Christian into secret Communion with God, and secret Communion is a sweet

Commu-

Communion, as that person tastes and experiences, who loves God indeed. Two Lovers have abundantly more delight and satisfaction in each other's company, when they are got in a corner, and no body to interrupt or observe them, than when they are in a croud and throng of People, or in a room, where many eyes are upon them; for there they cannot be so familiar and free, as their mutual affection doth require. We have free leave given us, yea, we are under a Divine Command, *to come to the throne of grace with boldness*, Heb. 4. 16. with a freedom of speech, to fetch up the bottom of our hearts, and tell our whole minds to God; but when the Saints go in company, many times he that is called out to be at that time the mouth of the rest to God, finds himself confin'd and bound up by a natural and over-powering modesty, and his Christian Child-like boldness is abated, nay, wholly to seek; and he is at such a great loss, and so exceedingly *troubled that he cannot speak*, that I may use the words of that holy man *Asaph*, Psal. 73. His freedom is turned into oppression, and he is so full of matter, that his heart is almost ready to break within him, because at that time he knoweth not how to give himself vent: in such a case there is an awe upon him, and

that

that doth issue in a painful restraint. Oh Christians, if you could hear some gracious Souls in their private Addresses to God, it would put you into an amazement, you could not forbear standing and wondering how bold they are with God, though not saucy; how familiarly they will speak to God, yet know and consider their distance; how plain they will be, how earnest and importunate, how they will plead with him, and produce their Arguments and strong Reasons, and with vehemency urge them, wrestling with him, as those that must have their Petitions granted, and will too, before they have done; and yet they do herein that which they have learned from above, and use those words which the Holy Ghost teacheth, who speaks in them: they do not herein forget themselves, or take too much upon them; nor are they more bold than welcome, when they have raised and enlarged their desires, and wound up their importunity to the highest pitch; they do no more than what they have their kind and gracious Father's allowance for, and then are their Prayers his Musick. And when they have done thus, who but themselves, and such as have taken the same course, are able to tell or conceive the fruit and advantage which thereby cometh into them? when

their

their Souls have had so large a vent, what ease do they find in themselves! what peace, but such as passeth understanding! how do their Faces shine, even as that of *Moses* did when he came down from the Mount? what delights have they had, what joys of Faith, what a satisfaction do they find within! This is no more than what holy *David* did with highest confidence promise unto himself; and I do not in the least question, but he was encouraged to promise so much to himself for the future, by the experiences he had had in former times, *Psal.* 63. 5, 6. *My soul*, saith he, *shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness*; He looked not only for a little taste, a drop of mercy, or some crumbs of comfort, so much only as would set him a longing, or keep life and soul together, but a full meal. He promised himself *the best*, not brown-bread and water, ordinary course fare, but *marrow and fatness*; yea, and *enough* too, a fulness, so that he should not rise up complaining, but admiring and triumphing; *my mouth shall praise thee with joyful lips*: when he had his sweet refreshing, his fill, then he would bless his Benefactor. But I desire you to take notice of the time when, and the place where, he did promise him elf these rich and comfortable Enjoyments, it was in his

retire-

retirements, in his secret converses with God. *When I remember thee upon my bed, and meditate upon thee in the night-watches.* Upon which words Mr. *Dickson* hath this Observation very appolite to the business in hand.

'The way to find refreshment spiritual, 'is, beside publick Ordinances, to give our 'selves to spiritual Exercises in secret, at 'such times as our civil and natural necessi-'ties may best spare, and then and there to 'recall to mind what we have heard, seen 'or felt of God's Word or Working, and 'to keep our thoughts upon this holy Sub-'ject by Prayer, Soliloquy, and Meditation. This, this brings in spiritual refreshment indeed; this warms the heart, this feasts it, this delights it, this raiseth it, this furnishes it with new Songs.

Sixthly, Secret Prayer shall not be vain. Our Lord Jesus doth not only walk in the midst of the Golden Candlesticks, in the great Congregations, in the full Assemblies of his Saints; tho', indeed, the Prophet tells us, *Psal.* 87. 2. *The Lord loveth the gates of Zion*, i. e. saith *Ainsworth*, the publick Assemblies, *more than all the dwellings of Jacob*: but he will graciously condescend so far as to afford his presence, and give a meeting to *two or three of his friends* when met toge-

ther

ther in his Name; there he will be in the midst of them. You have Christ's own word for your assurance in the Case, *Matth.* 18. 20. as to assist, so to accept, and bless, and do for them the good things which they desire; yea, his Grace is so infinite, and his Love so great, that his condescention shall be lower yet; for he will come into a corner, when he has a Child of his alone praying and crying. *Cantic.* 2. 14. *O my Dove, that art in the clefts of the rocks, and in the secret places of the stairs; let me see thy countenance, let me hear thy voice; for sweet is thy voice, and thy countenance is comely.* When she is most retired and absconded, Christ loves both to see her and hear her; tho' she be Sun-burnt with Persecution, and spotted with Infirmities, yet her Countenance is comely in the eye of Christ, because there he seeth his own and his Father's Image; and tho' her Prayers be broken, and as the chatterings of a *Crane*; yet the voice is sweet in the ear of Christ, because it is the language of his own Spirit. And although our Lord spake this to his Spouse the Church, yet it may be applied to particular Christians, who are Parts and Members of the Church, and may take the comfort of it to themselves. When *Elijah* was, as you heard, and we noted before, under the Juniper-Tree, God

was

was pleased to come and join himself to him, and would have from his own mouth an account of his Case, and the reason of his withdrawing himself; *What doest thou here, Elijah?* what was it that brought thee hither? and what is it that thou wouldst have of me? Know, O holy Soul, thou standest in the same relation to God, and hast the same interest in him, and mayst promise thy self the same kindness; God will not think it too much for his Majesty to come to thee alone when desired, and when he comes, to bring with him a blessing for thee: though thou takest none here to back thee, hast not a Friend on Earth to join in the Suit, yet do thou go and state thine own case, draw up thy Petition, and present it unto God with an hand of faith, setting the name of Christ to it, and God will presently add his *fiat*, his Amen; though it may be the answer shall not presently be given in to thee, yet the grant shall be past in Heaven, thy Father will say, *Be it unto this soul even as it will.* Nay, he will not only give the thing, if it be good for thee, but more too: and while thou askest like a Child, he will answer thee like a God.

A most gracious assurance hereof you have in the words of the Text from the mouth of Jesus Christ himself, who is the

faithful and true witness; *Thy father which seeth in secret, shall reward thee openly.* He sees the sincerity of thy heart, and the importunity of thy desires; he seeth how thou laboureſt at the Oar, and what pains thou haſt taken, and with what great wreſtlings thou haſt wreſtled; and having seen, *he will reward*; the work is done, and the reward is to come. So then, if thou wilt believe Chriſt, thou ſhalt not loſe thy labour, thou ſhalt not have pangs and throws of Soul, and after all bring forth nothing but wind; never did any one Holy Prayer fall ſhort of Heaven, and drop by the way; the great God is not wont to ſet his Children about any unprofitable work. *Paul*, I am ſure, was of that mind, when he ſaid in 1 *Cor.* 15. laſt, *Be ſtedfaſt, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labour ſhall not be in vain in the Lord.* As their grievous ſufferings turn them to a very good account, ſo ſhall all their holy actions: There is never an appointment of duty for them, but it carrieth in its Bowels a deſign of Mercy. *He ſaith not to the ſeed of Jacob, ſeek ye my face in vain*; the preparing and engaging of their hearts to pray, ſpeaks his readineſs and reſolution to *incline his ear* to hear. When he bids them *open their mouths*, it is that he might *fill them*; He

would not have them give a *knock* at his door to no purpose; but hath promised when they do, it shall be *opened to them*; and when he opens his *door*, he will open his *heart and hand too*, and not send them away empty. When he bids them *seek*, it is in order to their *finding*; and that which they find, shall be worth their while, and pay them for all the pains they took; to be sure they shall not have cause to complain, as those that sit down losers, and have a disappointment of their expectations. Nay, further, our Saviour tells us, that he will reward us *openly*. He will not be ashamed that the World should see how he useth his Servants, they shall see there is a reward for the Righteous; and though the Devil was a Fool in going about to charge rotten sordid designs, and a mercenary selfishness upon *Job*, yet he himself was forced to acknowledg, that *Job did not serve God for nought*. He will reward thee openly, both here and hereafter, before Angels and Men; as you have compassed his Altar with your Supplications, so will he compass you about with Favour and with Songs; he will make it manifest, he will convince his enemies, a foolish, wicked and ungrateful World, *of all the hard speeches which they have spoken against him*, they themselves shall see

fal-

false, That it is a vain thing to serve God; he will by his liberal rewards given them, extort from them this acknowledgment, That the *Lord is good to them that wait upon him, and to the soul that seeks him*; especially it shall be thus at the last and great day, which will be the day of recompences, the day in which *God will make up his Jewels*, and set them, not in *Gold*, but in *Glory*. *Then*, as you have it in *Mal.* 3. 18. yea, *then*, indeed, *shall ye discern between the righteous and the wicked*; *betweem him that serveth God, and him that serveth him not*; between him that seeketh God, and him that seeketh him not; between him that prayeth, and him that prayeth not. Then there shall be an apparent and manifest difference; the stone-blind World, those that are wickedly, wilfully blind, shall see it to their vexation and torment.

These are the motives by which I did design, and do hope to work upon your hearts, these the Silken Cords of a Man, the Rational Arguments, with which I would allure and draw you to the conscientious cheatful performance of this excellent, necessary and Soul-chearing, Soul-fattening Duty of Secret-Prayer; and oh that I might hear you have been wrought upon by them, and prevailed with. Now, that you might

do this work well, and not fail as to the right management of it, and so not miss and fall short of those singular benefits and advantages which come by it, I shall afford you what assistance I judge needful in the case, and in silence passing over those Directions which refer to Prayer in general, I shall give you up some that do particularly concern and relate to Secret-Prayer, they are these.: I beseech you mind and practise them.

First, Make thy secret approaches to God with the greatest solemnity of Spirit that thou canst; though thou goest in the *multitude of mercies*, and with *faith in Christ*, and with *hope of finding Grace*, yet be sure that *in his fear* thou worship toward his Holy Temple; though thou art alone, and without any here to be an eye-witness, do thou draw nigh unto him with as great an *awe and dread upon thy spirit*, with as great *humility and reverence in thy carriage and deportment*, as if thou hadst the eyes of all the World upon thee; though thou mayest in thy retirements be more *free and open*, in giving an account of thy self and thy condition, thy burthens, wants and desires, because *no body sees* thee, yet thou must not be *rude, unmannerly, and sawcy*, because God

sees

ſees thee. When thou art in a *corner*, God is in *Heaven*, upon a Throne of Glory, attended by innumerable Angels, who in his preſence cover their Faces with their Wings, as knowing their diſtance, their inability and unworthineſs to behold him. Remember thou haſt to do with *Majeſty*, yea, with an Infinite and Glorious Majeſty; And *ſhall not his excellency make you afraid? and his dread fall upon you?* Job 13. 11. And, indeed, then are we moſt excellent, when we do moſt fear God's Excellency. *David* began *Pſalm* 8. with the admiration of God's Excellency, *O Lord, our Lord, how excellent is thy name in all the earth!* And then in the ſame *Pſalm* he fell to humbling and vilifying thoughts and expreſſions of Man. *What is man that thou art mindful of him? and the ſon of man that thou viſiteſt him?* *Abraham* was the Father of the faithful, and the Friend of God; yet how low was he in his own eyes, and how much fill'd with an awe of God, when he alone ſtood before him, pleading for wicked *Sodom?* Obſerve how he carried, and what he ſaid, Geneſis 18. 27. *Behold now, I have taken upon me to ſpeak unto the Lord, which am but duſt and aſhes.* And *verſ.* 30. *O let not the Lord be angry, and I will ſpeak.* And yet again, *verſe* 32. *O let not the Lord be angry, and I*

will speak yet but this once. By all this you see, how much he was afraid of offending God; and this is that which God expects from his creatures, yea, from his dearest Children; he stands upon his honour, and looks to be treated like himself. *Levit.* 10.3. *Moses said unto Aaron, This is that the Lord spake, I will be sanctified in all them that come nigh me. See then that you have grace to serve him with reverence and godly fear, as knowing that your God is a consuming fire,* Heb. 12. 28, 29. *Nadab* and *Abihu* found him so, when destroyed by fire that came from his presence upon their not observing his order in matter of worship; they brought with them *strange* fire, and met with *devouring* fire. Therefore do you fear before him when you pray to him; and though no-body be by, remember and consider that God is by, as to hear your Prayers, so curiously to observe both the frame of your spirits, and the manner of your deportments before him; as he is of pitiful eyes, so of pure and piercing eyes, which cannot indure to behold iniquity, and from which nothing can be hid; all is naked and open before him with whom you have to do.

Secondly,

Secondly, When thou settest about the work of Secret-Prayer, study and endeavour secrecy to the utmost, and be as secret as ever thou canst; do not tell others the business thou art taking in hand; What though none know of it, let it be enough for thee that thy Father doth, for that is enough; he alone is sufficient to be thy witness, and to do for thee all that thou desirest. Never go to it with a design, nor in such manner that others may take notice of it for thy commendation. A Christian, indeed, may do Alms, and pray so as to be taken notice of, and let his light shine before Men in order *to the alluring of others, and drawing them to the like acts of piety and charity*: But to give others, by any means, an item of our private Duties, in order *to our own applause*, that we might have praise with Men, and be by them accounted in the number of serious, strict and eminent Christians, is too *low a pitch* for the Children of God to fly, it is *Pharisaically* wicked and abominable. And sure I am, you your selves will find it true at the last, That a *name* thus obtained, will not *pay the charge*, but cost you a great deal more than it is worth. It is far better for us to *take care of our duty*, and leave it to God to *take care of our names*. If we can please God,

and get to Heaven, we shall be glad to be there, though no-body knew all the sighs we took in the way thither. When thou art in the work, and warm at it, when the Fire burns, *speak with thy tongue*, It is thy *friend* in Prayer, and thy *glory* in Praises; but command it to keep a due *decorum*; be not *so loud* that others may hear; do not, like some, make the *street ring*; I readily grant that the lifting up of the voice is sometimes the *effect of an oppressed spirit*, whom speaking will not serve; there must be crying, and that aloud; sometimes it is the *effect of a soul fir'd and inflam'd* with holy longings; and it may be allowed to be an *help to the raising up of the spirit and affections*: Only when thou dost make use of it, get as far as thou canst out of the hearing of others, that thou mayest *not be as the hypocrites are*. If thou hast not conveniency for that, neither within doors nor without, then go to God as he came to *Elijah*, in a *soft and still voice*. Thy Father can *hear thy whispers*, for thou always speakest in his ear; yea more, Romans 8. 27. *He that searcheth the heart, knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit*. He had in the Verse before, spoken of *groans that could not be utter'd*; desires that are in the Soul which it knoweth not how to express;

press; but though thou canst utter neither sighs, nor groans, nor words, God knoweth your minds, what your spirits are working out after: when you say nothing, he can tell what you would have: *All my desire is before thee.* He understands the language of thy *sighs*, yea thy very *tears* are to him articulate, when he doth not hear the words of thy mouth. We do not find that Woman said any thing who washed Christ's Feet with her tears, and wiped them with the hairs of her head; but in those tears and actions Christ saw love and thankfulness; *much is forgiven her, therefore she loveth much*; yea he doth know what you have a mind to, by your very *looks*. Hence it was that when the floods compassed *Jonah* about, and all the billows and waves passed over him, and he looked upon himself as being in a perishing condition, he resolved upon giving God a look, before he was quite lost; *Jonah* 2. 4. *Then I said, I am cast out of thy sight, yet I will look again toward thy holy Temple*: and that look saved him, Verse 6. *Thou hast brought up my life from corruption, O Lord my God.* He lookt *pitifully* up to God, and God lookt *graciously* down upon him: do thou so act the *Saint*, as carefully to avoid every thing of the *Pharisee*.

Thirdly, When thou art *alone* in prayer, make it thy great desire and care to be with God. In all thy approaches *to* him, and in all thine appearances *before* him, make sure that thou be *with* him. The *Psalmist* could say, *Psal.* 139. 18. *When I awake, I am still with thee*: this some understand of the constancy of God's kindness. 'Though the 'most vigilant of the Saints sometimes fall 'into sleepiness and drowsiness of spirit, 'that they perceive not God's presence with 'them, nor care over them, nor love to 'them; yet when the Lord awaketh up 'their Souls, and reneweth their spiritual 'senses, they are made to see and acknow-'ledge, that the Lord doth never leave 'them, no, not when they least perceive his 'presence. But others do by this under-stand the gracious frame and workings of *David*'s Spirit. He was every morning with God; as soon as ever he opened his eyes, he directed them to God. God was the excellent and endeared Object that he would first converse with, and bestow his morning visit upon. I am still with thee by meditation. Oh that thou couldest say the same in truth as to this duty of Prayer. Lord, when I am at prayer, I am still with thee. I am often upon my knees, and I am as often with my God; 1 *John* 1. 3. *That which we*

have seen and heard, declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. Do you press after that, a fellowship with God; do you enquire for that, as *Elisha* when he had got the Mantle which his Master had dropt, he cried out, *Where is the Lord God of* Elijah? so do you: here is the Prayer, but where is the fellowship? Truly that Person is both wickedly and miserably alone in his duty, who is not with God in duty. He sins greatly in it, and he shall get nothing by it. That is an accursed privacy out of which the great and everblessed God is excluded. He is indeed *with thee* in all places, in thy greatest retirements; *Psal.* 139. 8. *If I ascend up into Heaven, thou art there; if I make my bed in Hell, thou art there.* So, if thou art in the Congregation, God is there; if in the Chamber, God is there; if in the Field, God is there. He fills all places, and he takes notice of all persons, and of all their Actions; but that is not enough; no gracious Soul that doth indeed love him, will sit down satisfied with that. While God is with thee by his Omnipresence observing thee, and all thy ways; what duties thou dost, and how thou dost them; it must be thy great care to be *with God* in a way of holy meditation and affection; to

have

have the *thoughts* dwelling with God, the *desires* running out to God, and the *delights* feasting upon God. Have a care, that when you pretend to be alone in your duty, you do not lay the reins upon your necks, and allow your minds in their loose and vain excursions. Christian, go to thy duty, and go to thy God too. So that good man wisely resolved; *Psal.* 43. 3, 4. *O send out thy light and truth, let them lead me, let them bring me unto thy hill, and to thy tabernacles; then will I go unto the altar of God, unto God my exceeding joy.* He would not stop at the Altar, but get up to the God who was worshipped there: and when thou art with him, keep with him, as close as thou canst; let no temptation draw thee away.

Fourthly, Whatsoever thou art in secret before God, reveal all thy secrets to him; deal plainly and openly with him; anatomize thy Soul in his presence; tell him all that is in thine heart, and all that thou remembrest hath been in thy life, and do not hide any thing from him: whatsoever thine own Conscience preacheth to thee, do thou go and repeat it all to God; confess to him those evil Actions thou didst in a corner, and under the covert of darkness, though no mortal eye saw them; nor can

any

any body charge thee with them. The keeping back of part of thy sins, may be thy ruine, as well as keeping back part of the price of the Land; and covering the fraud with a lie, was the death of *Ananias* and *Sapphira*. Acknowledge to him those heart-corruptions which did never come into act; the law in the members that warreth against the law in your mind; the sin that dwelleth in you; that cursed root of bitterness which lieth under ground: the vicious fountain that is continually bolling and bubling up in filthy thoughts and vile affections, though it never sent forth such muddy and abominable streams as run in an impetuous and rapid manner in the lives of others, overflowing all the banks that Religion and Reason do set them. In a word, Do thou thy self acquaint God with the plague of thine heart, which threatens the life of thy Soul, though there be no spots to be seen by others upon thee, though it doth not shew it self in botches and boils. I have already told you, that though you need not let men know, nor your dearest, intimate and most faithful Friends know all that you are chargeable with; yet you are bound to do so to God, and it is indeed no other than a giving of him the glory of his Omniscience, and (if you do it as you ought in a believing

ving

ving way) the glory of his Mercy and Goodness too, as being a God ready to forgive and multiply pardons. Besides, as I have said, it is in vain to hide any thing from him, because he seeth all, searcheth the hearts, possesseth the reins, and hath our most secret sins in the light of his countenance; *He that covers his sins, shall not prosper*; not in that action: when men go to cover, God will come to discover. *Adam* having sinned, went like a guilty Malefactor to hide himself, but God knew where he was, and fetcht him out with a word. *Achan* having stoln the wedge of Gold, and two hundred pieces of Silver, and a goodly Babylonish Garment, went and hid them in the earth in the midst of his Tent, but God made him fetch them out again. When all is done, plain-dealing is best, specially when you have to deal with God. And let me here add, That freedom and openness of heart in a way of humble confession unto God, is a very good argument of a gracious frame of heart, and speaks a person acted by an ingenuous filial spirit, that he is no friend to sin, no admirer of himself, but willing to load himself, that so he might the more loath himself, and work his heart into the greater admirings of *thee patient*, which, notwithstanding so many affronts,

hath

hath so long born with him; and *that grace*, which, notwithstanding so great provocations, doth yet open to him a door of hope. And take one thing with you further; this freedom and openness of heart in confessing your sins to God, is a singular and compendious way (mingling with it faith in Christ) to provide for your own peace and comfort: when you do humbly and freely load your selves with the acknowledgment of the sins you are guilty of, you may find them lie more light upon your Consciences: when you bind them upon your selves, you may find God loosing them, and taking them off by the assurance of a gracious and full pardon. Till *David* came to this, poor man, he was in a most dismal condition; *Psal.* 32. 3. *While he kept silence, his bones waxed old through his roaring all the day*: he kept silence, *i. e.* he did not confess sin; and then he was fain to spend all his time in roaring, because of the torment and anguish which he felt; and so long as he did not carry toward God in a way of ingenuity, God carried toward him in a way of severity. Vers. 24. *Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of Summer.* He was sunk under the weight of that hand, and broken almost to shivers, and dried up like a potsherd. But now see

what

ving way) the glory of his Mercy and Goodness too, as being a God ready to forgive and multiply pardons. Besides, as I have said, it is in vain to hide any thing from him, because he seeth all, searcheth the hearts, possesseth the reins, and hath our most secret sins in the light of his countenance; *He that covers his sins, shall not prosper*; is not in that action: when men go to cover, God will come to discover. *Adam* having sinned, went like a guilty Malefactor to hide himself, but God knew where he was, and fetcht him out with a word. *Achan* having stoln the wedge of Gold, and two hundred pieces of Silver, and a goodly Babylonish Garment, went and hid them in the earth in the midst of his Tent, but God made him fetch them out again. When all is done, plain-dealing is best, specially when you have to deal with God. And let me here add, That freedom and openness of heart in a way of humble confession unto God, is a very good argument of a gracious frame of heart, and speaks a person acted by an ingenuous filial spirit, that he is no friend to sin, no admirer of himself, but willing to load himself, that so he might the more loath himself, and work his heart into the greater admirings of *that patience* which, notwithstanding so many affronts hath

hath so long born with him; and *that grace*, which, notwithstanding so great provocations, doth yet open to him a door of hope. And take one thing with you further; this freedom and openness of heart in confessing your sins to God, is a singular and compendious way (mingling with it faith in Christ) to provide for your own peace and comfort: when you do humbly and freely load your selves with the acknowledgment of the sins you are guilty of, you may find them lie more light upon your Consciences: when you bind them upon your selves, you may find God loosing them, and taking them off by the assurance of a gracious and full pardon. Till *David* came to this, poor man, he was in a most dismal condition; *Psal.* 32. 3. *While he kept silence, his bones waxed old through his roaring all the day*: he kept silence, *i. e.* he did not confess sin; and then he was fain to spend all his time in roaring, because of the torment and anguish which he felt; and so long as he did not carry toward God in a way of ingenuity, God carried toward him in a way of severity. Vers. 24. *Day and night thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of Summer.* He was sunk under the weight of that hand, and broken almost to shivers, and dried up like a potsherd. But now see what

what a comfortable change was wrought, and how God appeared to his joy, when he brake off that sinful silence, yea, as soon as he took up a resolution of doing it! Ver. 5. *I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid: I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord, and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin.* So then, this is the way to remove Judgments, to pacifie the wrath and displeasure of God, to quiet the Conscience, to recover the sense of Divine Favour, and to get for broken bones, the joy of God's Salvation.

Fifthly, When thou art in secret, keep a strict watch over thy self: Watch over both thy Body and Soul; watch *over thy body*, that it may not sleep, as the Disciples did very unseasonably, when they had the greatest reason to keep awake. You know what our Saviour said, That *the body is weak where the spirit is willing*. It is a great sin, and therefore a great shame for people, (yea, such as profess godliness) when they are about the Work and Service of God in these Assemblies, hearing and praying, to sleep away so much of that precious time as they do, as if these things were none of their business, and they were not at all concerned in it. Sure I am, this is not to sit here as God's People sitteth; this is no sign of a serious Christian,

an, coming to hear for Life, and to pray for Life, and working out Salvation with fear and trembling; and yet they sleep in the midst of Observers, when they have some on all sides to give them an awakening jog; and I desire you to make conscience of doing it, it is an act of Duty and of Love; it is a friendly jog, and the party to whom you give it, is obliged to take it thankfully at your hands as a kindness: He doth not know how much he may lose by a little Nap; some precious Truth may then be spoken and passed, in which he was greatly concerned, and by which he might have been greatly benefited; but it is gone and lost as to him, he slept it away. But when thou art all alone, thou hast none by to do that friendly Office, to bestow a jog upon thee, then thou must do all the work thy self, and look to thy self; therefore thou shouldst be the more thine own Friend, and take the more care and pains. And also *watch thy Soul*, thine heart; keep it, as thou art commanded, with all diligence: And as *Deborah* said to her self when she was in the midst of her work, *Judges* 5. 12. *Awake, awake, Deborah; awake, awake, utter a Song*; so do you call upon your selves in your Duties, Awake, awake, O my Soul; awake, awake, lift up a Prayer: Thou hast now blow-

wrest-

wrestling-work in hand, do not be dull, heavy, and lazy at it; watch thine heart, for it needs it; and two things in particular it is very subject to, *wandrings* and *coolings*; the heart of man is *a wandering heart*, will not keep its way, nor dwell upon its proper Object. *David* could say, *My heart is fixed, O God, my heart is fixed*: But could he say so always? or canst thou? No, tho' it is fixed in its choice of God, in its affection to him, in its resolution for him; yet it hath not that fixation of thoughts and meditations upon him, nor that fixedness of fellowship and communion with him, which should be. Thou thinkest thou carriest thy heart with thee to thy duty; but dost thou not often find it hath given thee the slip and is gone before thou hast done? Therefore look to it, keep thine eye upon it, that it may keep its place, and to its business. But then again, the heart of man hath its *coolings*, as well as its *wandrings*: As it should keep its *way*, so it should carefully keep its *heat*. Be much, therefore, and frequent in stirring up thy self, when thou goest by thy self, to take hold of God, beware of all deadness and dulness, when thou art going to serve a living God. When fire-brands are together, they will help one another, and burn to the last: but he that would

would keep a single one alive, had need to tend it carefully, and be often blowing it, yea, and adding some fewel too. Watchfulness is as great and necessary a Duty, as any the Christian hath to do; he must watch *unto Prayer*, that he may not go about it unseasonably, that he may not lose a fit opportunity, but set up his sail as soon as the wind blows, and that he also might make use of all advantages for the tuning of his instrument, and getting his heart into a right frame; and he must watch likewise *in prayer*: that when he is at the work, he may not idle in it, and so lose his duty by losing himself, for want of looking to. Alas, what is Prayer without the heart, unprofitable to man, abominable to God: it is like a Carcase, when the Soul hath once forsaken it, a stinking and offensive thing; who would make a Present of it to a great King?

Sixthly, When thou art upon thy knees, engaged in secret Prayer unto God, be sure that thou double thy diligence, and put thy strength forth to the utmost. When a great many are lifting at an heavy weight, every one may spare himself, and put forth the less strength, because there is such a number to assist: but when there is no more than

than one single person tugging at it, he had need strain and labour hard, else he must leave it where, and as he found it. When we are joined together with others in Prayer, when with a Church of Christ, an Assembly of Saints, there is a number of Supplicants, a great many besieging the Throne of Grace, wrestling with God, and pulling down the Blessings which are desired; and then we may speak in the same manner as *David* did, *Psal.* 7. 6, 7. *Arise, O Lord, in thine anger, lift up thy self, because of the rage of mine enemies: awake for me, to the judgment which thou hast commanded; so shall the congregation of the people compass thee about; for their sakes therefore return thou on high.* Yea, when there is a Congregation of God's People compassing him about, we may say, Lord, for their sakes shew thy self, be exalted in thy strength and in thy goodness and mercy. Yet know, this is no Argument why any one single Member of that Church or Congregation should be remiss, and abate of his zeal and endeavours; for we are συναγωνισασθαι, *Rom.* 15. 30. When we *are together* in Prayer, we must *strive together in Prayer*; the word is very emphatical. When we are together, we must not be in Prayer only, but in an agony too; we must not only *seek* Mercy, but *strive* for it;

strive

strive mightily, as Wrestlers do, and Champions in the field: It is, saith *Beza*, a Metaphor taken from Military Affairs, and signifies such fervency and zeal as is used in matters of Life and Death; there must be a laying hold on God's strength, and a putting forth of ours, an acting to the utmost. Tho we are together, and that a great number together, yet we must every one strive, else it would be our shame; as in a School, if all the Boys are studying and conning their Lessons, any one should not mind it, but be toying and loitering; or as in a Workhouse, many should be labouring hard till the sweat run off their faces; but in the midst of that industrious Company, there should be one sleeping, and there another trifling: and also it will be to your loss; for tho' the Church may obtain a gracious Answer, and prevail for a Blessing, and delight themselves in the goodness of the Lord; yet the lazy, lukewarm Christian, who did nothing, or at best out of an indifferency of Spirit, will, an hundred to one, fall short, and miss of a share, being one of those foolish slothful seekers, that are not able. And while a *Jacob*, after his wrestling, is commended and rewarded, hath his Name changed, to his honour, from weak *Jacob*, to mighty *Israel*; from *Jacob* a Worm, to *Israel* a

Prince

Prince with God. While resolved and importunate Souls are most graciously smil'd upon, and sent away, as the Woman of *Canaan* was, with their desires fulfilled, and their joys running over; *Be it to you even as you will; I can, I will deny you nothing:* thou maist be sent away with a severe rebuke from God: *Thou wicked and slothful servant.* And what shall I say, with a flea in thine ear? no, no, with a sting in thy Conscience. But now if there be such joint endeavours required, such utmost striving when you go before God with your united forces, surely there is no reason why you should be cold and freeze, why you should trifle and be careless when you are alone, and in secret with God; No, no, then it doth nearly concern you to summon all the powers of your Souls, to muster all your forces, and to put all your affections into a lively and fervent frame, and every grace to its post and business. Being you have to do all your work your selves, get as much strength from Heaven as you can, and employ all you get: whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, thine own single hand, be sure that thou do it with all thy might. Christians, you must seek mercy diligently, if you would be successful in your seeking.

Seventhly,

Seventhly, Let not thy secret Prayer shut Prayer out of thy Family; do not make use of that performance as a sufficient excuse for this neglect and omission, neither think to stop the mouth of conscience now, with that which will not pass for a good plea when thou shalt come to appear before the Tribunal of an holy God. It is indeed thy duty to pray alone; and if thou dost do it, thou doest well; yet thou must not only pray alone, but with others also; yea, this is an indispensible duty, incumbent upon you who are Governours of Families; you should see to it, that your Houses be Churches, not *Bethevens*, Houses of vanity, but *Bethels*, the Houses of God. We read of a Church that was in the House of *Priscilla* and *Aquila*, 16 *Rom.* 5. and a Church which was in the House of *Nymphus*, *Coloss.* 4. 15. and a Church that was in *Philemon*'s House, *Philemon* 2. It is a common Saying and a true one, That every man is to be a Prophet, Priest and King in his own House: You do well enough remember your being Kings, and as such do insist much upon your Authority and Power, and know how to Lord it enough; only by the way take this short Advice which I shall give you; So rule as Kings, as not to degenerate into Tyrants; You are Heads, and to be honoured for such; but let not

your

your Crowns be Thorns, rending and tearing, afflicting and vexing those that live under your shadow, and should rejoyce in it. And withal, do not forget that you are to be *Prophets* too, teaching and instructing those that are under your Charge and Care. *Gen.* 8. 19. *I know Abraham, that he will command his children and his houshold after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord.* Yea, and you are to be *Priests* also, Praying for your Families, and with them: What is more reasonable than this? what more decent and comely? Do you not live together? do you not love together? do you not eat and drink together? do you not rejoice and make merry together? and I appeal to your own judgments; *Conscience*, what saith thou? should not, ought not these persons to worship God together? ought they not to pray together, and to seek the face of God together? This is the way to make your Communion an holy Communion, to sweeten your comforts and converse, and to sanctifie all your enjoyments. 1 *Tim.* 4. 4, 5. *Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.* Prayer, Family-Prayer, is needful for the sanctifying of Family-enjoyments; without it, you sit down at unsanctified Tables, and

you

you lie down in unsanctified beds; and I do heartily commend to your consideration and imitation the holy and brave Resolution of *Joshua*. He was a great Man, a Prince, Captain-General, and Leader of *Israel*; do you see how much he was fixed in this gracious purpose, *Josh.* 24. 15. *As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord*: not only *I*, but *we*; not only *we a-part*, but also *we together*.

And let every one of you lay aside your vain pretences, and weak reasons against a great duty. Never pretend *modesty* in the case: thou art ashamed to pray before others; but this is such a Fig-leaf as cannot cover thy nakedness; be ashamed of thy folly and sins, of thy vain words and frothy talk, but be not ashamed of thy work: be ashamed that thou dost it no better, but be not ashamed to do it: art thou asham'd to pray? but hast thou not a great deal more cause to be ashamed of thy not praying? Know for a certain, that is a sinful modesty which doth unfit and indispose thee for any part of thy duty.

Do not say, thou art not able to do it, thou art not furnished with gifts for such a work! But let me ask thee, whose fault is that? whom wilt thou blame for that? God for not giving them, or *thy self* for not getting them? not to be able to pray, is both thy sin and thy shame, and therefore thy shame,

because thy sin. Dost thou know how to beg thy bread, and dost thou not know how to beg thy life? dost thou know how to ask a kindness of Man, and not how to ask mercy of God? thou mayst blush to say so: thou wouldest be counted a wise man, but in this thou dost charge thy self with egregious folly. But I desire thee to begin. I fear thou hast not tried, be perswaded to try now. We have a Proverb amongst us pertinent to the case in hand, *Use legs, and have legs.* Praying is the ready way to get the gift of Prayer: practising is the most effectual way of learning. *Then shall we know, if we follow on to know the Lord.* Hosea 6. 3. and then shall we seek, if we follow on to seek the Lord: then shall we pray, if we follow on to pray: thou didst not know how to go at first, when thou wast an infant, couldst not set one foot before another; but by thy frequent trying, thou couldst do it in time, yea knowledge and strength coming on, thou couldst go, and run, and leap too; by doing thy duty, thou wilt attain to an ability and fitness to do it.

Eighthly, Make a wise choice of the time when thou wilt set about this Secret Prayer. Let it be done as in a right manner, so in the proper season. It is true, whensoever the

wind

wind bloweth, we should set up our Sails: open when Christ knocks, and answer when he calls, and go about that which he sets thee to: we should be very observant of the Spirit's motions, and comply with them: just as it was with the living Creatures and the wheels, *Ezek.* 1. 20. *Whithersoever the spirit was to go, the living creatures went, thither was their spirit to go, and the wheels were lifted up over against them, for the spirit of the living creatures*, or of life, *was in the wheels.* The spirit of God is to be the Spring, and all our Wheels should move as that Spring draws. Therefore when he puts thee upon Prayer, do not consult with this nor that, but apply to it immediately, but withal know, the Spirit of God is a Spirit of wisdom, and knows how to order motions regularly and seasonably, *Eccl.* 3. 1. *To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the Heaven; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance,* &c. *but man knoweth not his time,* Eccles. 9. 12. Often he doth not, therefore he doth often meet with troubles, snares and losses. Now the Spirit of God knows these times exactly, and moves accordingly: therefore if there be any unseasonable impulses and motions, reject

them, as those that are not of God, nor his Spirit.

Always take a fit time; make it thy business to pick it. God hath in his mercy given thee time enough for all thy work, and in his infinite wisdom he hath given thee choice opportunities for every part of it. Thou hast thy seasons for labour and for rest; seasons for buying and for selling; a season for praying and for hearing: now look thou carefully to it, that thou do every thing in its season: that is the excellent property of him whom the Scripture pronounceth a blessed man. He is, and *he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season*, Psal. 1. 3. We cannot well do two things at once; and that God who understandeth our frame, hath ordered out accordingly concerning us. There is but one thing thy duty at one time. Now it is thy business to understand what that one thing is, and so to do it. In short, Let not thy secret Prayer hinder thee from waiting upon *Publick Ordinances* and Publick Worship on God's Holy-day; the *Church* being met together in Christ's name, thou oughtest to meet with them, if able, because thou art a Member of that Body. Thou sinnest if thou art praying at home, when thou shouldest be hearing abroad. So,

God

God hath given thee time for the duties of thy *general Calling*, as a Christian; and for the business of thy *particular Calling* too; and he would have thee to mind both. It is not his will that thou shouldest be cruel to thy Body, or unnatural to thy Family, under a pretence of being tender over thy Soul. He that provides not for his own House, is so far from being a good Christian, that the Apostle *Paul* tells us in 1 *Tim.* 5.8. *He hath denied the faith*, i. e. practically, and in his deeds, and *is worse than an Infidel*, who doth from a natural instinct take care of his own. Thou who sittest under the light of the Gospel, and hast the Law of God revealed and opened to thee, art far worse than the Heathens, because thou dost neglect that duty which they perform, who have no other Light to direct them, than that of Nature. Know, O man, thou sinnest if thou art in thy Closet, when it is thy duty to be in thy Shop; or thou, O woman, when thou oughtest to be employed about the affairs of thy Family; and thou, O Servant, when thou shouldest be doing thy Master's or thy Mistris's business: thy time, to be sure, is none of thine own; thou must not injure them to serve him. *He hates robbery for burnt offering.* Come, Christians, learn a piece of holy wisdom; do righteousness at

all times, and in all things. Keep all the Wheels going, and all in their order. The right *timing* of what you do, is putting of a glory upon what you do: if all men would keep their place, and wisely time their actions, we should have better men, and a better World than now we have, *Eccles.* 3. 11. *God hath made every thing beautiful in his time.* How beautiful is frost in Winter, and heat in Summer: joys and comfort, *if need* be; yea and heavinesse, by reason of manifold temptations, *if need* be: all the Works of God are done with the greatest exactnes as to every circumstance, in a proper time, and in a lovely order; so let yours be done too to the best of your knowledge, and the utmost of your power.

Lastly, When thou art in secret at thy Prayers unto God, carry in thine head and heart the cases of others, and be an humble Supplicant unto a God in their behalf: tho thou shouldest pray alone, yet not for thy self alone: tho thou dost shut others out of thy Closet and Chamber, yet give them a room in thy remembrances, affections and Petitions. Take them in the arms of thy love, and carry their Cases along with thee to the Throne of Grace, and there speak many a good word for them in the ears of God, who gives

gives thee free leave to beg for others as well as thy self, and delights to see his Children come into his presence cloathed with bowels. He was so pleased with *Abraham's* importunity for the sparing of *Sodom*, tho' the people thereof was exceeding wicked before him, that he did not stick at granting all that *Abraham* desired, nor would he go away till *Abraham* had done. When Christ was pleased to Tabernacle among men, how was he flock'd to! how did they throng about him, bringing with them their Children and Friends, their Sick, Blind, Lame, and Possessed, that he might cure them! and they had that of him which they came for. Hast thou none of thy Relations that are so spiritually? Is not thy Yoke-fellow, Brother, Sister, Child, Servant, blinded with ignorance of the things of God, deaf to Reproof, Counsel, Instruction and Intreaty? so lame, that they cannot take one right step in the way of God and Duty? possessed with a lying Devil, or a swearing Devil, or a drunken Devil, or an unclean Devil? Carry them in thy Prayers to God, and beg of him that he would stretch out his Almighty hand, and cure them. But that I may draw to a Close: When thou art most in private, do not forget the *Publick*; in thy Cabbin, be-

flow.

flow some thoughts upon, and spend some suits and sighs about the Ship; for in that thou art embarqued, and in the peace thereof it is that thou must have peace: Let the *Nation* be remembred by thee; it is the Land of thy Nativity, the place where thou wast born and bred, and in which thou hast enjoyed and abounded with Mercies temporal and spiritual; thou owest it Prayers. It is indeed a sinful Nation, a People loaden with Iniquity, that hates to be reformed, and is settled upon its Lees; but upon that score it needs Prayer the more. There are Thousands pulling down Judgments by their Superstition and loud-crying Profaneness, and making a Breach for an whole Sea to break in upon us: But Thou, O Saint, and such as thou art, have the more need to stand in the gap. Let *Sion, the Church of God*, have a very large share. *David* was resolved, that he would seek her good; and the poor *Captives* that sate by the Rivers of *Babylon*, when they remembred desolate *Sion*, did not only drop a tear or two, but wept Rivers, and had *rather their right-hands should forget their cunning, and their tongues cleave to the roof of their mouths, than that they should forget Jerusalem, or not prefer Her before their highest joy.* O let the same mind be in you, now that her condition is very low, and we cannot

cannot tell what may be the products of the ensuing year. And that the Sacrifice of Prayer may be fired, and send up before the Throne of God, a vehement and pure flame; often think, and seriously meditate upon that which *Jehovah* hath spoken to you, *Isa.* 66. 10. *Rejoice ye with Jerusalem, and be glad with her, all ye that love her. Rejoice for joy with her, all ye that mourn for her, that ye may suck, and be satisfied with the breasts of her consolations, that ye may milk out, and be delighted with the abundance of her glory.*

There are some that *need* your Prayers, do you supply them; there are some that have *desir'd* your Prayers, do you satisfie them; there are some to whom you have *promised* your Prayers, be you as good your word to them: they expect much good will come to them by means of them, do not you disappoint their expectations. In this way help thy Relations, do good to thy Friends and Neighbours, heap coals of fire upon the heads of thine Enemies, help to bear up the Pillars of a shaking Nation, give a lift towards the raising of *Jacob* now he is small, and a blow to *Babylon*: And thus, tho' our Prayers should oftentimes be private, yet our Spirits ought to be publick. It is no small comfort to the Saints and People

ple of God, That they have a Stock of Prayer going for them all the world over. Now if thou wouldst have any benefit and advantage by that Stock, see carefully to it, that thou be every day putting something in.

FINIS.

ple of God, That they have a Stock of Prayer going for them all the world over: Now if thou wouldst have any benefit and advantage by that Stock, see carefully to it, that thou be every day putting something in.

FINIS.